

MAGAZINE SHORT STORIES, 1882-1962

THE SOILED ROSE By D. H. Lawrence
THE CASE OF THE DIXON TORPEDO BY Arthur Morrison
THE BABY PARTY, by F. Scott Fitzgerald.
FROM BEYOND by H. P. Lovecraft
THE MISSING WILL, by Agatha Christie
THE LAUGH MAKER, by James O. Curwood
THE RECRUIT, by Bryce Walton
MR. THOMPSON AND THE BULL-FROG, by Allan Forman

THE SOILED ROSE
By D. H. LAWRENCE
from Internet Archive etext of The Blue Review - May 1913

IT was a mile nearer through the wood. Mechanically, Syson turned up by the forge and lifted the field-gate. The blacksmith and his mate stood still, watching this self-assured trespasser. But Syson, dressed in stylish tweeds, looked too much a gentleman to be accosted. They let him go on, in silence across the small field to the wood. There was not the least difference between this morning and those of the bright springs, six or eight years back. White and sandy-gold fowls still scratched round the gate, littering the earth and the field with feathers and scratched-up rubbish. Between the two thick holly bushes in the wood-hedge was the hidden gap, whose fence one climbed to get into the wood ; the bars were scored just the same by the keeper's boots.

Syson was extraordinarily delighted. It is a wonderful thing, at twenty-nine, to have a Past. Like an emigrant he had returned, on a visit to the country of his past, to make comparison. The hazel still spread glad little hands downwards, the bluebells here were still wan and few, among the lush grass and in shade of the bushes.

The path through the wood, on the very brow of a slope, ran easily for a time. All around were twiggy oaks, just issuing their gold, and floor spaces diapered with woodruff, with patches of dog-mercury and tufts of hyacinth. The two fallen trees still lay across the track. Syson jolted down a steep, rough slope, and was again upon the open land, this time looking north as through a great window in the wood. He stayed to gaze over the level fields of the hill -top, at the village which strewed the bare upland plain as if it had tumbled off the passing waggons of civilisation, and been forsaken. There was a forlorn modern little grey church, and blocks and rows of red dwellings lying at random ; at the back, the twinkling headstocks of the pit, and the looming pit-hill. All was naked and out-of-doors, not a tree ! It was quite unaltered

since his childhood.

Syson turned, satisfied, to follow the path that sheered downhill into the wood. He started. A keeper was standing a few yards in front, barring the way.

" Where might you be going this road, sir ? " asked the keeper. The man was inclined to be offensive. Syson looked at him with an artist's impersonal, observant gaze. The keeper was a young man of four or five and twenty, ruddy and comely. He had large, dark blue eyes, which now stared aggressively. His black moustache, very thick, was cropped short over a small, rather self-conscious, almost feminine mouth. In every other respect the man was unusually virile . He was just above middle height ; the strong forward thrust of his chest, and the perfect ease of his erect, proud carriage gave one the feeling that he was taut with life, like the thick jet of a fountain balanced at ease. He stood with the butt of his gun on the ground, staring insolently and questioningly at Syson. The dark, restless eyes of the trespasser, examining the man as if he were a tree or a flower, troubled the keeper and made him angry.

" Where's Naylor, and his velveteen skirts ? He can't be dead— — ? " Syson implored.

"* You're not from the House, are you ? " inquired the keeper. It could not be, since everyone was away.

Syson's mobile mouth broke into a laugh.

"No, I'm not from the House," he said. It seemed to amuse him.

" Then are you going to answer my question ? " said the keeper disagreeably.

" Which ? Oh, certainly — I beg your pardon ! " Syson was laughing all the time. " I am going to Willey Water Farm."

" This isn't the road." The man was certainly a bully.

" I think so. Down this path, paddle through the water from the well, and out by the white gate. I could go blindfold."

" Happen so, but you'd be trespassing all the same, did you know that ? "

" Did I ? I say, how strange ! I am sorry. No, I used to come so often, in Naylor's time, I had forgotten. Where is he, by the way ? ' "

" Crippled with rheumatism," the keeper answered reluctantly.

" I say ! " Syson exclaimed in pain.

" You'd happen tell me what your name is ? " asked the keeper,

with a new intonation.

" John Adderley Syson, late of Cordy Lane."

" As used to court Hilda Millership ? "

Syson's eyes opened with a curious smile. He nodded. There was a very awkward silence.

" And you will introduce yourself ? " asked Syson.

" Arthur Pilbeam — Naylor's my uncle," said the other.

" You live here in Nuttall ? M

" I'm lodgin' at my uncle's — at Naylor's."

" I see ! "

" Did you say you was goin' down to Willey Water ? " asked the keeper.

" Yes."

** Well, at that rate I should like you to know — as T'm courtin' Hilda Millership."

The keeper looked at the intruder with a blaze of defiance, almost pitiful. Syson opened new eyes of astonishment.

" No-o ? " he cried, with incredulous irony. The keeper went scarlet to the ears. But :

" And she," he said, huffed, " is keeping company with me."

" Good God ! " exclaimed Syson. The other man waited uncomfortably.

" And is it a fixed thing between you ? " asked the intruder.

" What do you mean by that ? " retorted the other, sulkily.

" Well — does she—do vou think of getting married before long ? "

It was evidently a sore point. The keeper kicked at a sod.

" We sh'd ha' been married afore now, if " Pilbeam was

full of resentment.

" Ah ! " Syson expressed his understanding in the mono-syllable.

"I'm married myself," he added, after a time.

" You are !" said the other, incredulously, with a touch of contempt.

Syson laughed in his brilliant, quick way,

" This last fifteen months," he said.

The keeper gazed at him with heavy, sulky, inscrutable gaze, apparently thinking back, and making connection.

" Why, what of it ? " asked Syson.

" Nothing," said the other sulkily, turning away.

There was silence for a moment.

" Ah well ! " said Syson, " I will leave you, I suppose you don't intend to turn me back." The keeper paid no attention. The two men stood high in an open space, grassy, set round with small sheaves of sturdy bluebells ; a little open platform on the brow of the hill. Syson took a few indecisive steps forward, then stopped.

" I say, how lovely ! " he cried.

He had come in full view of the downslope. The wide path ran from his feet like a river, and it was full of bluebells, save for a green winding thread down the centre, where the keeper walked. Like a stream the path opened into azure shallows at the levels, and there were pools of bluebells, with still the green thread winding through, like a thin current of ice-water through blue lakes. And from under the twig-purple of the bushes swam the shadowed blue, as if the flowers lay in flood water over the woodland.

" Ah, isn't it lovely ! " Syson exclaimed, a world of regret in his tones ; for this was his past, the country he had abandoned, in which he was now only a visitor. Wood pigeons cooed overhead, and the air was full of the brightness of myriad birds singing.

" If you're married, as you reckon you are, what do you keep writing to her for, and sending her all them poetry books and things ? " asked the keeper. Syson stared at him in astonishment for a time, then he began to smile :

" You see," he said, " I was not aware that she — that you . . . ,"

Again the keeper flushed scarlet.

" But if you reckon to be married " he charged.

u Well ? " queried the other mockingly.

But, looking down the blue, beautiful path, Syson felt he had been wrong. " I have been keeping her — a sort of dog-in-the-manger," he said to himself. Aloud :

" She knows I'm married and all that," he said.

" What do you keep on with her for, then ? " urged the keeper.

" But why shouldn't I ? " Syson returned. He knew quite well. There was silence. Syson suddenly struck his thigh with his gloves, and drew himself up.

" Good-day," he said, bowing, very polite and distant. He strode off downhill. Now, everything seemed to him ironic : the two willows, one all gold and perfume and murmur, one silver green and bristly, reminded him that here he had taught her about pollination. And now, in the paths sacred to their youth, he was walking under a smart of condemnation from a game-keeper, for interfering with the latter's girl.

" Ah well," he said to himself ; the poor chap seems to have a grudge against me because she won't marry him. I'll do my best on his behalf." He grinned to himself, being in a very bad temper.

The farm was less than a hundred yards from the wood's edge. Almost, the wall of trees seemed to form the fourth side to the open quadrangle. The house faced the wood. With many pangs, Syson noted the plum-blossom falling on the daffodils and on the profuse, coloured primroses, which he himself had brought here and set. How they had increased ! There were thick tufts of scarlet, and pink, and pale purple primroses, under the plum-trees. He saw somebody glance at him through the kitchen window, heard men's voices.

The door opened suddenly : ; very womanly she had grown ! He felt himself going pale.

" You ? — Addy ! " she exclaimed, and stood motionless.

" Who ? " called the farmer's voice. Men's low voices answered. Those low voices, curious, and almost sneering, roused the ironic spirit in the visitor. Smiling brilliantly at her he bowed low :

" Myself— in all humility," he said.

The flush burned very deep on her cheek and throat.

" We are just finishing dinner," she said.

" Then I will stay outside." He made a motion to show that he would sit on the red earthenware pipkin that stood near the door among the daffodils, and contained the drinking water.

" Oh no, come in," she said hurriedly. He entered with reluctance. In the doorway, he glanced swiftly over the family, and bowed. Everyone was confused. The farmer, his wife, and the four sons sat at the coarsely laid dinner -table, the men with arms bare to the elbows.

" I am sorry I interrupt your lunch," said Syson.

" Don't mention it. Sit down and have a bit," said the farmer, trying to be free and easy.

" It's early for me," said Syson.

He noticed the women were uncomfortable, and would rather he did not accept.

" Why, what time do you reckon to have your dinner ? " asked Frank, the second son, insolently.

" Dinner ? — usually at half-past seven."

" Oh — ah ! " sneered the sons altogether.

They had once been intimate friends with this young man.

" We'll give Addy something when we've finished," said the mother, an invalid.

" Do not let me be any trouble. Lunch does not matter to me."

" He alius could live on fresh air an' scenery," laughed the youngest son, a lad of nineteen.

Syson went round the buildings, and into the orchard at the back of the house, where daffodils all along the hedgerow swung like yellow, ruffled birds on their perches. He loved the place extraordinarily, the hills ranging round, with bear-skin woods covering their giant shoulders, and small red farms like brooches clasping their garments ; the blue streak of water in the valley, the bareness of the pasture on the home-hills, the sound of myriad-threaded bird-song, which went mostly unheard. To his last day, he would dream of this place, when he felt the sun on his face, or saw the small handfuls of snow between the winter twigs.

Hilda was very womanly. In her presence, he felt boyish. She was twenty-nine, as he was, but she seemed to him much older. As he was fingering some shed plum-blossom on a low bough, she came to the back door to shake the tablecloth. Fowls raced from the stackyard, birds rustled from the trees. Her dark auburn hair was gathered up in a coil like a crown on her head. She was very straight, imperious in her bearing. As she folded the cloth, she looked away over the hills.

Presently Syson returned indoors. She had prepared eggs and

curd cheese, stewed gooseberries and cream.

" Since you will dine to-night," she said, " I have only given you a light lunch.* 1

" It is perfectly arcadian and delightful," he said. " I almost look for your belt of straw and ivy buds."

Still they mocked each other with irony. He knew it hurt her. But — she was courting the game-keeper and she should marry him.

In his private heart he was thinking, " What a woman she is— what a lot older she is ! " He was afraid of her now, seeing her so much altered. Her curt, sure speech, her proud, hard bearing, her reserve, were unfamiliar to him. He admired again her grey-black eyebrows, and her lashes ; he quarrelled with her set mouth, with the expressionless composure of her face. Their eyes met. He saw, in the beautiful grey and black of her glance, tears and bitterness, and at the back of all, calm acceptance of sorrow.

" She's much older than I," he said to himself. With an effort he kept up the ironic manner.

She sent him into the parlour while she washed the dishes. The long low room was refurnished from the Abbey sale, with chairs upholstered in claret-coloured rep, many years old, and an oval table of polished walnut, and a fresh piano, handsome, though still antique. In spite of the strangeness, he was pleased. Opening a high cupboard let into the thickness of the wall, he found it full of his books, his old lesson-books, and volumes of verse he had sent her, English and German. The daffodils in the white window-bottoms, shone across the room, he could almost feel their rays. The old glamour caught him again. His youthful watercolours on the walls no longer made him grin ; he remembered how fervently he had tried to paint for her, twelve years before.

She entered, wiping a dish, and he saw again the bright, kernel-white beauty of her arms.

" You are quite aristocratic here," he said, and their eyes met.

■- Do you like it ? " she asked. It was the old, low, husky tone of intimacy. He felt a quick change beginning in his blood.

" Ay," he nodded, smiling at her like a boy again. She bowed her head,

" This was the countess's chair/" she said in low tones. <(I found her scissors down here between the padding."

"Ay—! Show me."

Quickly, with a lilt in her movement, she fetched her work-basket, and together they examined the long-shanked old scissors.

" What a ballad of dead ladies ! " he said, laughing, as he fitted his fingers into the round loops of the countess's scissors.

" You are the only man who could use them," she said, with a little thrill. He looked at his ringers, and at the scissors :

" The only one of your men, perhaps," he said, putting the scissors aside with a sudden darkening in his soul. She turned to the window. He noticed the fine, fair down on her cheek and her upper lip, and her soft, white neck, like the throat of a nettle flower, and her fore-arms, bright as newly blanched kernels. She was being discovered afresh to him, who thought he knew her so thoroughly.

" Shall we go out awhile ? " she asked softly.

" Ay ! " he answered. But the predominant emotion, that flooded over the daring and the ecstasy in his heart, was fear. Something big was going to happen to him and to her, unless he took care, his soul warned him.

She put no covering on her head, merely took off her apron, saying : " We will go by the larches." As they passed the old orchard, she called him in to show him a blue-tit's nest in one of the apple-trees, and a sycock's in the hedge. He rather wondered at her surety, for she had been one to go dreamily unobservant.

" Look at the apple buds," she said, and he then perceived myriads of little scarlet balls among the drooping boughs. Watching his face, she laughed. He was dumb and stupid, and at the bottom, afraid. If he were going to fall in love with this old lover, whose youth had marched with his as stately, religious nights march beside reckless days, then it would be a love that would invade many lives and lay them waste. His soul realised this, not his reason. His mind was almost paralysed.

For her part, she was brilliant as he had not known her. She showed him nests : a jenny wren's in a low bush.

" See this jinty's ! ■* she exclaimed.

He was surprised to hear her use the local name. She reached carefully through the thorns, and put her finger in the nest's round door.

" Five ! " she said. " Teenty little things."

She showed him nests of robins, and chaffinches, and linnets, and buntings ; of a wagtail beside the water :

" And if we go down, nearer the lake, I will show you a king-fisher's"

" Among the young fir-trees," she said, " there's a throstle's or a blackie's on nearly every shelf — hundreds. The first day, when I had seen them all, I felt as if I mustn't go in the wood. It seemed a city of birds : and in the morning, hearing them all* I thought of the clamour of early markets. I was afraid to go in my own wood."

The wasted poet in him did honour to her. He felt weak as water in her hands. She did not mind his silence, but was always a brilliant hostess entertaining him in her wood. As they came along a marshy path where forget-me-nots were opening in a rich blue drift :

" We know all the birds, but there are many flowers we can't find out,"—" I can't find out," she quickly corrected herself.

" We ? " he questioned.

She looked dreamily across to the open fields that slept in the sun :

" I have a lover as well, you know," she gently reprimanded him, dropping again into the intimate tone.

This woke in him the spirit of combat.

" I think I met him. He is very bonny — also in Arcady."

Without answering, she turned into a dark path that led up hill, where the trees and undergrowth were very thick.

" They did well," she said at length, " to have various altars to various gods, in old days."

<(Ah yes ! " he agreed. " And which have you turned to now ? "

" Do you think I have left the old one ? " she asked, pathetically.

" No, not really. It was your highest, the one you kneeled at with me — — "

" But you have left it," she said. He caught his breath, with a quick, painful frown.

" Ay — but the man doesn't matter so much," he said. There was a pause.

" And you are mistaken. I have turned away," she admitted, in a low, husky tone, averting her face from him.

There was silence, during which he pondered. The path was almost flowerless, gloomy. At the side, his heels sank into soft clay.

" No," she said, very slowly, " I was married the same night as you."

He looked at her a quick question.

" Not legally, of course," she replied, in the same grave, deliberate manner, " But — actually."

" ' Tandaradei/ " he mocked.

She turned to him brightly.

" You thought I could not ? " she said. But the flush was deep in her cheek and throat, for all her seeming assurance.

Still he would not say anything.

" You see," — she was making an effort to explain— " / had to understand also, to keep pace."

To keep pace, she meant, with Syson, whom she loved with the deepest part of her nature.

" And does it amount to much, this understanding ? " he asked, cynically. She was shocked,

" A very great deal — does it not to you ? " she replied.

" And you are not disappointed ? "

" Far from it ! " Her tone was deep and sincere.

" Then you love him ? "

" Yes, I love him." She was tender, and gentle, in her thought of the keeper.

" Good ! " he said.

This silenced her for a while.

" Here, among his things, I do love him truly," she said.

His conceit would not let him be silent.

" And me ? " he asked, bitinglly.

" So different ! " she cried.

He laughed shortly.

" You turned Opportunist ? " he said,

" 'Tis your doing," she replied.

For a moment the hearts of these two idealists stood still with despair.

They came to a place where the undergrowth shrank away, leaving a bare, brown space, pillared with the brick-red and purplish trunks of pine trees. On the fringe, was the sombre green of elder trees, with flat flowers in bud, and bright, unfurling pennons of fern. In the midst of the bare space stood a keeper's log hut. Pheasant-coops were lying about, some occupied by a clucking hen, some empty.

Hilda walked over the brown pine needles to the hut, took a key from among the eaves and opened the door. It was a bare wooden place with a carpenter's bench and form, carpenter's tools, an axe, snares, traps, some skins pegged down, everything in order. Hilda closed the door. Syson examined the weird fiat coats of wild animals, that were pegged down to be cured. She pressed some knots of wood in the side wall, and an opening appeared in the bare logs, disclosing a second, small apartment,

" Is he a romantic, then ? " asked Syson, ponderingly.

" Perhaps so ! He is very curious — up to a certain point, cunning— in a nice sense— and inventive, and so thoughtful — but not beyond a certain point."

She pulled back a dark green curtain. The apartment was occupied almost entirely by a large couch of heather and bracken, on which was spread an ample rabbit-skin rug. On the floor were patchwork rugs of cat-skin, and a red calf-skin, while hanging from the wall were other furs, Hilda took down one, which she put on. It was a cloak of rabbit-skin edged with white fur, and with a hood, apparently of the skins of stoats. She laughed at Syson from out of this barbaric mantle, saying ;

" What do you think of it ? "

" Ah ! I congratulate you on your man," he replied.

" And look ! " she said.

In a little jar on a shelf were some sprays, frail and white, of the first honeysuckle.

u They will scent the place at night," she said.

He looked round curiously.

" Then where does your keeper come short ? " he asked. She gazed at him for a few moments. Then, turning aside —

" The stars aren't the same with him," she said, intensely, " nor the forget-me-nots. You could make them flash and quiver,

and the forget-me-nots come up at me like phosphorescence.
I have found it out — it is true."

He laughed, saying :

" After all, stars and forget-me-nots are only luxuries."

" Ay," she assented sadly. " It is a pity."

Again he laughed quickly at her.

" Why ? " he asked, mockingly.

She turned swiftly. He was leaning against the small window of the tiny obscure room, and was watching her, who stood in the doorway, still cloaked in her mantle. His cap was removed, so she saw his face and head distinctly in the dim room. His black, straight, glossy hair was brushed clean back from his brow. His black eyes were playing a polite game with her, and his face, that was clear and cream, and perfectly smooth and healthy, was nickered with polite irony.

" You are very different," she said bitterly.

Again he laughed.

" I see you disapprove of me," he said.

" I disapprove of what you are becoming," she said.

" But you have still hopes of me ! Then what must I do to be " — he checked himself — ■* to avoid this calamity ? "

She saw that he was always laughing at her.

" If your own soul doesn't tell you, I cannot."

" I say," he cried, mock-serious, " where have I heard that before ? Besides," he continued politely, " one cannot live in Rome without being Romanised — unless one is fanatically patriotic — -and really, you know, I am of no country."

« No— — ? " she said bitterly.

" Unless I have been adopted unaware." That, he felt, was insulting, and his spirit turned in shame.

" You are a Roman of the Romans," she said sarcastically.

u Of the emasculated period," he laughed. " But 'twas you would have it so."

" I ! " she exclaimed.

" You would have me take the Grammar School scholarship — and you would have me foster poor little Botell's fervent attachment to me, till he couldn't live without me— and because Botell was rich and influential. You insisted on my accepting the wine-merchant's offer to send me to Cambridge, there to chaperon his only child. Then you bade me go into the business until I had money— and then — and then— — ; well, ' Now ' is the realisation. I have done exceedingly well, for an orphan son of a village school-master."

" And I am responsible ? " she asked, with sarcasm.

" I was a most plastic youth," he laughed.

" Ah," she cried, " I sent you away too young."

"* But I am a great success — and really, I enjoy it. You keep preaching me the ' Tongues in trees * business, and ' good in everything ' that is not London. But I assure you, there's quite a lot to be said for my side. ' I would not change it.* ,!

" You are too glib," she said, in very cutting tones,

" I always had that defect," he said, bowing.

There was a rattling at the outer latch, and the keeper entered. The woman glanced round, but remained standing, fur-cloaked, in the inner doorway. Syson, quite indifferent, did not move.

The keeper entered, saw, and turned away without speaking. The others also were silent.

Pilbeam attended to his skins.

" Have we finished our duel ? " asked Syson.

" I have nothing more to say," she replied.

" Then I give you ' To our vast and varying fortunes.' He lifted his hand in pledge.

" ' To our vast and varying fortunes,' " she answered, bowing gravely, and speaking in cold tones.

" Arthur ! " she said.

The keeper pretended not to hear. Syson, watching keenly, began to smile. The woman drew herself up.

" Arthur ! " she said again, with a curious upward inflection, which warned the two men that her soul was trembling on one of those sudden changes that are so striking in women ; as when a drop of acid suddenly throws out a black, turbid precipitate in a clear liquid.

The keeper slowly put down his tool and came to her.

" Yes," he said. *

"I wanted to introduce you," she said, cold and deliberate.

"I know him — I've met him before," growled the keeper.

" Never mind — I want to introduce you formally. Addy, Mr. Pilbeam, to whom I am engaged to be married. Arthur — Mr. Syson, who was an old friend of ours." Syson bowed, but the other mechanically held out his hand. The two men shook hands.

" Allow me to congratulate you heartily," said Syson. In his heart he was saying bitterly, " Mrs. Pilbeam — Good God ! "

He bade the woman good-bye.

'■ Which way will you go ? " she asked.

" Over Foster's," he replied.

" Arthur, you will go with Mr. Syson to the gate," she said.

They went all three together down the gloomy path .

" Ah les beaux jours de bonheur indicible

CKi nous joignons nos bouches ..."

quoted Syson, half-sincere, half-mocking.

" C'est possible ! " she replied, in the same spirit.

" Good ! " he cried. " We might have rehearsed it. I never could help being sentimental. How does it go on ?

' Qu'il etait bleu, le ciel, et grand l'espoir,' "

" I never liked farce," she replied, cuttingly. " Besides, we cannot walk in our wild oats. You were too modest and good to sow any at that time."

Syson looked at her. He was shocked that she could sneer at their young love, which had been the greatest thing he had known. Certainly he had killed her love at last, as he had often wished he could. Now he felt a great sense of desolation.

At the bottom of the path she left him. As he went along with the keeper, towards the open, he said :

" You will let me know when you are going to be married, will you?"

" Why ? " asked the keeper.

" Because she will not write to me — at least till after— I know,"

(< Well ! " said the keeper, disagreeably, but hesitating.

" I shan't be in Nuttall again for years— perhaps never. I shall want to know your news, for all that. So if you'll write to me, I will write to you. All the correspondence shall be between us two,"

He handed the young keeper his card.

" All right then— we'll let it stand at that."

They were at the gate. Syson held out his hand. When he was a dozen yards across the field, the other called :

u I say, I s'll only write when there's something definite."

" Quite so ! " said Syson, and each turned his several way.

Instead of going straight to the high road gate, Syson went along the wood's edge, where the brook spread out in a little bog, and under the alder trees, among the reeds, great yellow stools and bosses of marigolds shone. Threads of brown water trickled by, touched with gold from the flowers. Suddenly, there was a blue flash in the air, as a kingfisher passed.

Syson was extraordinarily wretched. He climbed the bank to the gorse bushes, whose sparks of blossom had not yet gathered into a flame. Lying on the dry brown turf, he discovered sprigs of tiny purple milkwort and pink spots of lousewort. He began to count his losses. In spite of himself, he was unutterably miserable, though not regretful. He would not alter what he had done. Yet he was drearily, hopelessly wretched. After a while he had got it clear.

" She always knew the best of me, and believed in the best I might be. Whilst she kept her ideal ' Me ' living, I was sort of responsible to her : I must live somewhere up to standard. Now

I have destroyed Myself in her, and I am alone, my star is gone out. I have destroyed the beautiful ' Me ' who was always ahead of me, nearer the realities. And I have struck the topmost flower from off her faith. And yet it was the only thing to do, considering all the other folk ..."

He lay quite still, feeling a kind of death.

Presently he heard voices : the keeper was coming down the path, with his wife.

" Say what ails thee ? " Syson heard the keeper ask gently, but with a touch of resentment.

" I am a bit upset — don't bother me," pleaded the woman.

Syson turned over. The air was full of the sound of larks, as if the sunshine above were condensing and falling in a shower. Amid this bright sound, the voices sounded like horn-music.

" Yes, but what upsets thee," persisted the man.

" Go home now, Arthur. I will talk to you to-night."

Syson looked through the bushes. Hilda was leaning on the gate, tears running down her face. The man was in the field, loitering by the hedge, and, Syson at last made out, was catching the bees as they settled on the white bramble flowers, crushing them in his palm, and letting them fall, not aware what he was doing.

There was silence for a while, in which Syson imagined her tears among the brightness of the larks. Suddenly the keeper exclaimed " Ah ! " and swore loudly. He was gripping at the sleeve of his coat, near the shoulder. Then he pulled off his jacket, threw it on the ground, and absordedly rolled up his shirt sleeve right to the shoulder.

<(Ah ! " he said vindictively, as he picked out the bee and flung it away. He twisted his fine, bright arm, peering awkwardly over his shoulder.

" What is it ? " asked Hilda quietly.

" A bee — crawled up my sleeve and stung me," he answered.

" Come here to me," she said.

The keeper went to her, like a sulky boy. She took his hand-some arm in her hands.

" Here it is — and the sting left in — poor bee ! "

She picked out the sting, put her mouth to his arm, and sucked away the drop of poison. As she looked at the red mark her mouth had made, and at his arm, she said, laughing winsomely out of her tears :

" That is the reddest kiss you will ever have."

He put his arms round her, and was kissing her. When Syson next looked up, at the sound of voices, he saw the keeper with his mouth on the throat of his beloved, whose head was thrown back, and whose hair had fallen, so that one rough rope of dark brown hair hung across his bare arm.

(- No," the woman answered. " I am not upset because he's gone. You won't understand "

Syson could not distinguish what the man said. Hilda replied, clear and distinct :

" You know I love you. He has gone quite out of my life — I don't know what I should do without you" She ended plaintively. He kissed her warmly, murmuring. She laughed quickly.

Yes," she said indulgent, but slightly bitter. " We will be married, we will be married. You can tell people, and make arrangements." He embraced her again. Syson heard nothing for a time. Then she said :

u You must go home, now, dear— you will get no sleep."

" Shall we be married at church, or chapel or what ? "

" We will be married at church."

It was the first time she had used the plural pronoun in that way, which moved the keeper to embrace her fervently. xlt last he pulled on his coat and departed. She stood at the gate, not watching him, but looking south over the sunny counties towards London, far away.

When at last she had gone, Syson also departed, going south.

=====

Martin Hewitt, Investigator.

THE CASE OF THE DIXON TORPEDO.

BY ARTHUR MORRISON.

The Project Gutenberg EBook of The Strand Magazine, Volume VII, Issue 42, June, 1894, by Various

Hewitt was very apt, in conversation, to dwell upon the many curious chances and coincidences that he had observed, not only in connection with his own cases, but also in matters dealt with by the official police, with whom he was on terms of pretty regular and, indeed, friendly acquaintanceship. He has told me many an anecdote of singular happenings to Scotland Yard officials with whom he has exchanged experiences. Of Inspector Nettings, for instance, who spent many weary months in a search for a man wanted by the American Government, and in the end found, by the merest accident (a misdirected call), that the man had been lodging next door to himself the whole of the time; just as ignorant, of course, as was the inspector himself as to the enemy at the other side of the party-wall. Also of another inspector, whose name I cannot recall, who, having been given rather meagre and insufficient details of a man whom he anticipated having great difficulty in finding, went straight down the stairs of the office where he had received instructions, and actually _fell over_ the man near the door, where he had stooped down to tie his shoe-lace! There were cases, too,

in which, when a great and notorious crime had been committed and various persons had been arrested on suspicion, some were found among them who had long been badly wanted for some other crime altogether. Many criminals had met their deserts by venturing out of their own particular line of crime into another: often a man who got into trouble over something comparatively small, found himself in for a startlingly larger trouble, the result of some previous misdeed that otherwise would have gone unpunished. The rouble note-forger, Mirsky, might never have been handed over to the Russian authorities had he confined his genius to forgery alone. It was generally supposed at the time of his extradition that he had communicated with the Russian Embassy, with a view to giving himself up--a foolish proceeding on his part, it would seem, since his whereabouts, indeed, even his identity as the forger, had not been suspected. He _had_ communicated with the Russian Embassy, it is true, but for quite a different purpose, as Martin Hewitt well understood at the time. What that purpose was is now for the first time published.

* * * * *

The time was half-past one in the afternoon, and Hewitt sat in his inner office examining and comparing the handwriting of two letters by the aid of a large lens. He put down the lens and glanced at the clock on the mantelpiece with a premonition of lunch; and as he did so his clerk quietly entered the room with one of those printed slips which were kept for the announcement of unknown visitors. It was filled up in a hasty and almost illegible hand thus:--

Name of visitor: _F. Graham Dixon_.

Address: _Chancery Lane_.

Business: _Private and urgent_.

"Show Mr. Dixon in," said Martin Hewitt.

Mr. Dixon was a gaunt, worn-looking man of fifty or so, well although rather carelessly dressed, and carrying in his strong though drawn face and dullish eyes the look that characterizes the life-long strenuous brain-worker. He leaned forward anxiously in the chair which Hewitt offered him, and told his story with a great deal of very natural agitation.

"You may possibly have heard, Mr. Hewitt--I know there are rumours--of the new locomotive torpedo which the Government is about adopting; it is, in fact, the Dixon torpedo, my own invention; and in every respect--not merely in my own opinion, but in that of the Government experts--by far the most efficient and certain yet produced. It will travel at least four hundred yards farther than any torpedo now made, with perfect accuracy of aim (a very great desideratum, let me tell you), and will carry an unprecedentedly heavy charge. There are other advantages, speed, simple discharge, and so forth, that I needn't bother you about. The machine is the result of many years of work and disappointment, and its design has only been arrived at by a careful

balancing of principles and means, which are expressed on the only four existing sets of drawings. The whole thing, I need hardly tell you, is a profound secret, and you may judge of my present state of mind when I tell you that one set of drawings has been stolen."

"From your house?"

"From my office, in Chancery Lane, this morning. The four sets of drawings were distributed thus: Two were at the Admiralty Office, one being a finished set on thick paper, and the other a set of tracings therefrom; and the other two were at my own office, one being a pencilled set, uncoloured--a sort of finished draft, you understand--and the other a set of tracings similar to those at the Admiralty. It is this last set that has gone. The two sets were kept together in one drawer in my room. Both were there at ten this morning, of that I am sure, for I had to go to that very drawer for something else, when I first arrived. But at twelve the tracings had vanished."

"You suspect somebody, probably?"

"I cannot. It is a most extraordinary thing. Nobody has left the office (except myself, and then only to come to you) since ten this morning, and there has been no visitor. And yet the drawings are gone!"

"But have you searched the place?"

"Of course I have. It was twelve o'clock when I first discovered my loss, and I have been turning the place upside down ever since--I and my assistants. Every drawer has been emptied, every desk and table turned over, the very carpet and linoleum have been taken up, but there is not a sign of the drawings. My men even insisted on turning all their pockets inside out, although I never for a moment suspected either of them, and it would take a pretty big pocket to hold the drawings, doubled up as small as they might be."

"You say your men--there are two, I understand--had neither left the office?"

"Neither; and they are both staying in now. Worsfold suggested that it would be more satisfactory if they did not leave till something was done towards clearing the mystery up, and although, as I have said, I don't suspect either in the least, I acquiesced."

"Just so. Now--I am assuming that you wish me to undertake the recovery of these drawings?"

The engineer nodded hastily.

"Very good; I will go round to your office. But first perhaps you can tell me something about your assistants; something it might be awkward to tell me in their presence, you know. Mr. Worsfold, for instance?"

"He is my draughtsman--a very excellent and intelligent man, a very smart man, indeed, and, I feel sure, quite beyond suspicion. He has

prepared many important drawings for me (he has been with me nearly ten years now), and I have always found him trustworthy. But, of course, the temptation in this case would be enormous. Still, I cannot suspect Worsfold. Indeed, how can I suspect anybody in the circumstances?"

"The other, now?"

"His name's Ritter. He is merely a tracer, not a fully skilled draughtsman. He is quite a decent young fellow, and I have had him two years. I don't consider him particularly smart, or he would have learned a little more of his business by this time. But I don't see the least reason to suspect him. As I said before, I can't reasonably suspect anybody."

"Very well; we will get to Chancery Lane now, if you please, and you can tell me more as we go."

"I have a cab waiting. What else can I tell you?"

"I understand the position to be succinctly this: the drawings were in the office when you arrived. Nobody came out, and nobody went in; and _yet_ they vanished. Is that so?"

"That is so. When I say that absolutely nobody came in, of course I except the postman. He brought a couple of letters during the morning. I mean that absolutely nobody came past the barrier in the outer office--the usual thing, you know, like a counter, with a frame of ground glass over it."

"I quite understand that. But I think you said that the drawings were in a drawer in your _own_ room--not the outer office, where the draughtsmen are, I presume?"

"That is the case. It is an inner room, or, rather, a room parallel with the other, and communicating with it; just as your own room is, which we have just left."

"But then, you say you never left your office, and yet the drawings vanished--apparently by some unseen agency--while you were there, in the room?"

"Let me explain more clearly." The cab was bowling smoothly along the Strand, and the engineer took out a pocket-book and pencil. "I fear," he proceeded, "that I am a little confused in my explanation--I am naturally rather agitated. As you will see presently, my offices consist of three rooms, two at one side of a corridor, and the other opposite: thus." He made a rapid pencil sketch.

"In the outer office my men usually work. In the inner office I work myself. These rooms communicate, as you see, by a door. Our ordinary way in and out of the place is by the door of the outer office leading into the corridor, and we first pass through the usual lifting flap in the barrier. The door leading from the _inner_ office to the corridor is always kept locked on the inside, and I don't suppose I unlock it

once in three months. It has not been unlocked all the morning. The drawer in which the missing drawings were kept, and in which I saw them at ten o'clock this morning, is at the place marked D--it is a large chest of shallow drawers, in which the plans lie flat."

"I quite understand. Then there is the private room opposite. What of that?"

"That is a sort of private sitting-room that I rarely use, except for business interviews of a very private nature. When I said I never left my office I did not mean that I never stirred out of the inner office. I was about in one room and another, both the outer and the inner offices, and once I went into the private room for five minutes, but nobody came either in or out of any of the rooms at that time, for the door of the private room was wide open and I was standing at the book-case (I had gone to consult a book), just inside the door, with a full view of the doors opposite. Indeed, Worsfold was at the door of the outer office most of the short time. He came to ask me a question."

"Well," Hewitt replied, "it all comes to the simple first statement. You know that nobody left the place or arrived, except the postman, who couldn't get near the drawings, and yet the drawings went. Is this your office?"

The cab had stopped before a large stone building. Mr. Dixon alighted and led the way to the first floor. Hewitt took a casual glance round each of the three rooms. There was a sort of door in the frame of ground glass over the barrier, to admit of speech with visitors. This door Hewitt pushed wide open, and left so.

He and the engineer went into the inner office. "Would you like to ask Worsfold and Ritter any questions?" Mr. Dixon inquired.

"Presently. Those are their coats, I take it, hanging just to the right of the outer office door, over the umbrella stand?"

"Yes, those are all their things--coats, hats, stick, and umbrella."

"And those coats were searched, you say?"

"Yes."

"And this is the drawer--thoroughly searched, of course?"

"Oh, certainly, every drawer was taken out and turned over."

"Well, of course, I must assume you made no mistake in your hunt. Now tell me, did anybody know where these plans were, beyond yourself and your two men?"

[Illustration: "I WAS STANDING AT THE BOOKCASE."]

"As far as I can tell, not a soul."

"You don't keep an office-boy?"

"No. There would be nothing for him to do except to post a letter now and again, which Ritter does quite well for."

"As you are quite sure that the drawings were there at ten o'clock, perhaps the thing scarcely matters. But I may as well know if your men have keys of the office?"

"Neither. I have patent locks to each door and I keep all the keys myself. If Worsfold or Ritter arrive before me in the morning, they have to wait to be let in; and I am always present myself when the rooms are cleaned. I have not neglected precautions, you see."

"No. I suppose the object of the theft--assuming it is a theft--is pretty plain: the thief would offer the drawings for sale to some foreign Government?"

"Of course. They would probably command a great sum. I have been looking, as I need hardly tell you, to that invention to secure me a very large fortune, and I shall be ruined, indeed, if the design is taken abroad. I am under the strictest engagements to secrecy with the Admiralty, and not only should I lose all my labour, but I should lose all the confidence reposed in me at headquarters should, in fact, be subject to penalties for breach of contract, and my career stopped for ever. I cannot tell you what a serious business this is for me. If you cannot help me, the consequences will be terrible. Bad for the service of the country, too, of course."

"Of course. Now tell me this. It would, I take it, be necessary for the thief to exhibit these drawings to anybody anxious to buy the secret--I mean, he couldn't describe the invention by word of mouth?"

"Oh, no, that would be impossible. The drawings are of the most complicated description, and full of figures upon which the whole thing depends. Indeed, one would have to be a skilled expert properly to appreciate the design at all. Various principles of hydrostatics, chemistry, electricity, and pneumatics are most delicately manipulated and adjusted, and the smallest error or omission in any part would upset the whole. No, the drawings are necessary to the thing, and they are gone."

At this moment the door of the outer office was heard to open, and somebody entered. The door between the two offices was ajar, and Hewitt could see right through to the glass door left open over the barrier, and into the space beyond. A well-dressed, dark, bushy-bearded man stood there carrying a hand-bag, which he placed on the ledge before him. Hewitt raised his hand to enjoin silence. The man spoke in a rather high-pitched voice and with a slight accent. "Is Mr. Dixon now within?" he asked.

"He is engaged," answered one of the draughtsmen; "very particularly engaged. I'm afraid you won't be able to see him this afternoon. Can I give him any message?"

"This is two--the second time I have come to-day. Not two hours ago Mr. Dixon himself tells me to call again. I have a very important--very excellent steam-packing to show him that is very cheap and the best of the market." The man tapped his bag. "I have just taken orders from the largest railway companies. Cannot I see him, for one second only? I will not detain him."

"Really, I'm sure you can't this afternoon--he isn't seeing anybody. But if you'll leave your name----"

"My name is Hunter; but what the good of that? He ask me to call a little later and I come, and now he is engaged. It is a very great pity." And the man snatched up his bag and walking-stick and stalked off indignantly.

Hewitt stood still, gazing through the small aperture in the doorway.

"You'd scarcely expect a man with such a name as Hunter to talk with that accent, would you?" he observed, musingly. "It isn't a French accent, nor a German; but it seems foreign. You don't happen to know him, I suppose?"

"No, I don't. He called here about half-past twelve, just while we were in the middle of our search and I was frantic over the loss of the drawings. I was in the outer office myself, and told him to call later. I have lots of such agents here, anxious to sell all sorts of engineering appliances. But what will you do now? Shall you see my men?"

"I think," said Hewitt, rising, "I think I'll get you to question them yourself."

"Myself?"

"Yes, I have a reason. Will you trust me with the key of the private room opposite? I will go over there for a little, while you talk to your men in this room. Bring them in here and shut the door--I can look after the office from across the corridor, you know. Ask them each to detail his exact movements about the office this morning, and get them to recall each visitor who has been here from the beginning of the week. I'll let you know the reason of this later. Come across to me in a few minutes."

Hewitt took the key and passed through the outer office into the corridor.

Ten minutes later, Mr. Dixon, having questioned his draughtsmen, followed him. He found Hewitt standing before the table in the private room, on which lay several drawings on tracing-paper.

"See here, Mr. Dixon," said Hewitt, "I think these are the drawings you are anxious about?"

The engineer sprang toward them with a cry of delight. "Why, yes,

yes," he exclaimed, turning them over, "every one of them. But where--how--they must have been in the place after all, then? What a fool I have been!"

Hewitt shook his head. "I'm afraid you're not quite so lucky as you think, Mr. Dixon," he said. "These drawings have most certainly been out of the house for a little while. Never mind how--we'll talk of that after. There is no time to lose. Tell me, how long would it take a good draughtsman to copy them?"

"They couldn't possibly be traced over properly in less than two or two and a half long days of very hard work," Dixon replied, with eagerness.

"Ah! then, it is as I feared. These tracings have been photographed, Mr. Dixon, and our task is one of every possible difficulty. If they had been copied in the ordinary way, one might hope to get hold of the copy. But photography upsets everything. Copies can be multiplied with such amazing facility that, once the thief gets a decent start, it is almost hopeless to checkmate him. The only chance is to get at the negatives before copies are taken. I must act at once; and I fear, between ourselves, it may be necessary for me to step very distinctly over the line of the law in the matter. You see, to get at those negatives may involve something very like housebreaking. There must be no delay--no waiting for legal procedure--or the mischief is done. Indeed, I very much question whether you have any legal remedy, strictly speaking."

"Mr. Hewitt, I implore you, do what you can. I need not say that all I have is at your disposal. I will guarantee to hold you harmless for anything that may happen. But do, I entreat you, do everything possible. Think of what the consequences may be!"

"Well, yes, so I do," Hewitt remarked, with a smile. "The consequences to me, if I were charged with housebreaking, might be something that no amount of guarantee could mitigate. However, I will do what I can, if only from patriotic motives. Now, I must see your tracer, Ritter. He is the traitor in the camp."

"Ritter? But how?"

"Never mind that now. You are upset and agitated, and had better not know more than necessary for a little while, in case you say or do something unguarded. With Ritter I must take a deep course; what I don't know I must appear to know, and that will seem more likely to him if I disclaim acquaintance with what I do know. But first put these tracings safely away out of sight."

Dixon slipped them behind his book-case.

"Now," Hewitt pursued, "call Mr. Worsfold and give him something to do that will keep him in the inner office across the way, and tell him to send Ritter here."

Mr. Dixon called his chief draughtsman and requested him to put in

order the drawings in the drawers of the inner room that had been disarranged by the search, and to send Ritter, as Hewitt had suggested.

Ritter walked into the private room, with an air of respectful attention. He was a puffy-faced, unhealthy-looking young man, with very small eyes and a loose, mobile mouth.

"Sit down, Mr. Ritter," Hewitt said, in a stern voice. "Your recent transactions with your friend, Mr. Hunter, are well known both to Mr. Dixon and myself."

Ritter, who had at first leaned easily back in his chair, started forward at this, and paled.

"You are surprised, I observe; but you should be more careful in your movements out of doors if you do not wish your acquaintances to be known. Mr. Hunter, I believe, has the drawings which Mr. Dixon has lost, and, if so, I am certain that you have given them to him. That, you know, is theft, for which the law provides a severe penalty."

Ritter broke down completely and turned appealingly to Mr. Dixon:--

"Oh, sir," he pleaded, "it isn't so bad, I assure you. I was tempted, I confess, and hid the drawings; but they are still in the office, and I can give them to you--really, I can."

"Indeed?" Hewitt went on. "Then, in that case, perhaps you'd better get them at once. Just go and fetch them in--we won't trouble to observe your hiding-place. I'll only keep this door open, to be sure you don't lose your way, you know--down the stairs, for instance."

The wretched Ritter, with hanging head, slunk into the office opposite. Presently he reappeared, looking, if possible, ghastlier than before. He looked irresolutely down the corridor, as if meditating a run for it, but Hewitt stepped toward him and motioned him back to the private room.

"You mustn't try any more of that sort of humbug," Hewitt said, with increased severity. "The drawings are gone, and you have stolen them--you know that well enough. Now attend to me. If you received your deserts, Mr. Dixon would send for a policeman this moment, and have you hauled off to the gaol that is your proper place. But, unfortunately, your accomplice, who calls himself Hunter--but who has other names beside that, as I happen to know--has the drawings, and it is absolutely necessary that these should be recovered. I am afraid that it will be necessary, therefore, to come to some arrangement with this scoundrel--to square him, in fact. Now, just take that pen and paper, and write to your confederate as I dictate. You know the alternative if you cause any difficulty."

Ritter reached tremblingly for the pen.

"Address him in your usual way," Hewitt proceeded. "Say this: '_There has been an alteration in the plans_' Have you got that? '_There has

been an alteration in the plans. I shall be alone here at six o'clock. Please come, without fail._' Have you got it? Very well, sign it, and address the envelope. He must come here, and then we may arrange matters. In the meantime, you will remain in the inner office opposite."

The note was written, and Martin Hewitt, without glancing at the address, thrust it into his pocket. When Ritter was safely in the inner office, however, he drew it out and read the address. "I see," he observed, "he uses the same name, Hunter; 27, Little Carton Street, Westminster, is the address, and there I shall go at once with the note. If the man comes here, I think you had better lock him in with Ritter, and send for a policeman--it may at least frighten him. My object is, of course, to get the man away, and then, if possible, to invade his house, in some way or another, and steal or smash his negatives if they are there and to be found. Stay here, in any case, till I return. And don't forget to lock up those tracings."

* * * * *

It was about six o'clock when Hewitt returned, alone, but with a smiling face that told of good fortune at first sight.

"First, Mr. Dixon," he said, as he dropped into an easy chair in the private room, "let me ease your mind by the information that I have been most extraordinarily lucky--in fact, I think you have no further cause for anxiety. Here are the negatives. They were not all quite dry when I--well, what?--stole them, I suppose I must say; so that they have stuck together a bit, and probably the films are damaged. But you don't mind that, I suppose?"

He laid a small parcel, wrapped in newspaper, on the table. The engineer hastily tore away the paper and took up five or six glass photographic negatives, of the half-plate size, which were damp, and stuck together by the gelatine films, in couples. He held them, one after another, up to the light of the window, and glanced through them. Then, with a great sigh of relief, he placed them on the hearth and pounded them to dust and fragments with the poker.

For a few seconds neither spoke. Then Dixon, flinging himself into a chair, said:--

"Mr. Hewitt, I can't express my obligation to you. What would have happened if you had failed I prefer not to think of. But what shall we do with Ritter now? The other man hasn't been here yet, by-the-bye."

"No--the fact is, I didn't deliver the letter. The worthy gentleman saved me a world of trouble by taking himself out of the way." Hewitt laughed. "I'm afraid he has rather got himself into a mess by trying two kinds of theft at once, and you may not be sorry to hear that his attempt on your torpedo plans is likely to bring him a dose of penal servitude for something else. I'll tell you what has happened.

"Little Carton Street, Westminster, I found to be a seedy sort of place--one of those old streets that have seen much better days. A good

many people seem to live in each house--they are fairly large houses, by the way--and there is quite a company of bell-handles on each doorpost--all down the side, like organ-stops. A barber had possession of the ground-floor front of No. 27 for trade purposes, so to him I went. 'Can you tell me,' I said, 'where in this house I can find Mr. Hunter?' He looked doubtful, so I went on: 'His friend will do, you know--I can't think of his name; foreign gentleman, dark, with a bushy beard.'

"The barber understood at once. 'Oh, that's Mirsky, I expect,' he said. 'Now I come to think of it, he has had letters addressed to Hunter once or twice--I've took 'em in. Top floor back.'

"This was good, so far. I had got at 'Mr. Hunter's' other alias. So, by way of possessing him with the idea that I knew all about him, I determined to ask for him as Mirsky, before handing over the letter addressed to him as Hunter. A little bluff of that sort is invaluable at the right time. At the top floor back I stopped at the door and tried to open it at once, but it was locked. I could hear somebody scuttling about within, as though carrying things about, and I knocked again. In a little while the door opened about a foot, and there stood Mr. Hunter--or Mirsky, as you like--the man who, in the character of a traveller in steam-packing, came here twice to-day. He was in his shirt sleeves and cuddled something under his arm, hastily covered with a spotted pocket-handkerchief.

"I have called to see M. Mirsky,' I said, 'with a confidential letter ----.'

"Oh, yas, yas,' he answered, hastily; 'I know--I know. Excuse me one minute.' And he rushed off downstairs with his parcel.

"Here was a noble chance. For a moment I thought of following him, in case there might be anything interesting in the parcel. But I had to decide in a moment, and I decided on trying the room. I slipped inside the door, and, finding the key on the inside, locked it. It was a confused sort of room, with a little iron bedstead in one corner and a sort of rough boarded inclosure in another. This I rightly conjectured to be the photographic darkroom, and made for it at once.

"There was plenty of light within when the door was left open, and I made at once for the drying-rack that was fastened over the sink. There were a number of negatives in it, and I began hastily examining them one after another. In the middle of this, our friend Mirsky returned and tried the door. He rattled violently at the handle and pushed. Then he called.

"At this moment I had come upon the first of the negatives you have just smashed. The fixing and washing had evidently only lately been completed, and the negative was drying on the rack. I seized it, of course, and the others which stood by it.

"Who are you, there, inside?' Mirsky shouted indignantly from the landing. 'Why for you go in my room like that? Open this door at once,

or I call the police!"

"I took no notice. I had got the full number of negatives, one for each drawing, but I was not by any means sure that he had not taken an extra set; so I went on hunting down the rack. There were no more, so I set to work to turn out all the undeveloped plates. It was quite possible, you see, that the other set, if it existed, had not yet been developed.

"Mirsky changed his tune. After a little more banging and shouting, I could hear him kneel down and try the keyhole. I had left the key there, so that he could see nothing. But he began talking softly and rapidly through the hole in a foreign language. I did not know it in the least, but I believe it was Russian. What had led him to believe I understood Russian I could not at the time imagine, though I have a notion now. I went on ruining his stock of plates. I found several boxes, apparently of new plates, but, as there was no means of telling whether they were really unused or were merely undeveloped, but with the chemical impress of your drawings on them, I dragged every one ruthlessly from its hiding-place and laid it out in the full glare of the sunlight--destroying it thereby, of course, whether it was unused or not.

"Mirsky left off talking, and I heard him quietly sneaking off. Perhaps his conscience was not sufficiently clear to warrant an appeal to the police, but it seemed to me rather probable at the time that that was what he was going for. So I hurried on with my work. I found three dark slides--the parts that carry the plates in the back of the camera, you know--one of them fixed in the camera itself. These I opened, and exposed the plates to ruination as before. I suppose nobody ever did so much devastation in a photographic studio in ten minutes as I managed.

"I had spoilt every plate I could find and had the developed negatives safely in my pocket, when I happened to glance at a porcelain washing-well under the sink. There was one negative in that, and I took it up. It was _not_ a negative of a drawing of yours, but of a Russian twenty-rouble note!

"This _was_ a discovery. The only possible reason any man could have for photographing a bank-note was the manufacture of an etched plate for the production of forged copies. I was almost as pleased as I had been at the discovery of _your_ negatives. He might bring the police now as soon as he liked; I could turn the tables on him completely. I began to hunt about for anything else relating to this negative.

"I found an inking-roller, some old pieces of blanket (used in printing from plates), and in a corner on the floor, heaped over with newspapers and rubbish, a small copying-press. There was also a dish of acid, but not an etched plate or a printed note to be seen. I was looking at the press, with the negative in one hand and the inking-roller in the other, when I became conscious of a shadow across the window. I looked up quickly, and there was Mirsky, hanging over from some ledge or projection to the side of the window, and staring straight at me, with a look of unmistakable terror and apprehension.

"The face vanished immediately. I had to move a table to get at the window, and by the time I had opened it, there was no sign or sound of the rightful tenant of the room. I had no doubt now of his reason for carrying a parcel downstairs. He probably mistook me for another visitor he was expecting, and, knowing he must take this visitor into his room, threw the papers and rubbish over the press, and put up his plates and papers in a bundle and secreted them somewhere downstairs, lest his occupation should be observed.

"Plainly, my duty now was to communicate with the police. So, by the help of my friend the barber downstairs, a messenger was found and a note sent over to Scotland Yard. I awaited, of course, for the arrival of the police, and occupied the interval in another look round--finding nothing important, however. When the official detective arrived he recognised at once the importance of the case. A large number of forged Russian notes have been put into circulation on the Continent lately, it seems, and it was suspected that they came from London. The Russian Government have been sending urgent messages to the police here on the subject.

"Of course I said nothing about your business; but while I was talking with the Scotland Yard man a letter was left by a messenger, addressed to Mirsky. The letter will be examined, of course, by the proper authorities, but I was not a little interested to perceive that the envelope bore the Russian Imperial arms above the words, 'Russian Embassy.' Now, why should Mirsky communicate with the Russian Embassy? Certainly not to let the officials know that he was carrying on a very extensive and lucrative business in the manufacture of spurious Russian notes. I think it is rather more than possible that he wrote--probably before he actually got your drawings--to say that he could sell information of the highest importance, and that this letter was a reply. Further, I think it quite possible that, when I asked for him by his Russian name and spoke of 'a confidential letter,' he at once concluded that I had come from the Embassy in answer to his letter. That would account for his addressing me in Russian through the keyhole; and, of course, an official from the Russian Embassy would be the very last person in the world whom he would like to observe any indications of his little etching experiments. But anyhow, be that as it may," Hewitt concluded, "your drawings are safe now, and if once Mirsky is caught--and I think it likely, for a man in his shirt-sleeves, with scarcely any start and, perhaps, no money about him, hasn't a great chance to get away--if he is caught, I say, he will probably get something handsome at St. Petersburg in the way of imprisonment, or Siberia, or what-not; so that you will be amply avenged."

"Yes, but I don't at all understand this business of the drawings even now. How in the world were they taken out of the place, and how in the world did you find it out?"

"Nothing could be simpler; and yet the plan was rather ingenious. I'll tell you exactly how the thing revealed itself to me. From your original description of the case, many people would consider that an impossibility had been performed. Nobody had gone out and nobody had

come in, and yet the drawings had been taken away. But an impossibility is an impossibility after all, and as drawings don't run away of themselves, plainly somebody had taken them, unaccountable as it might seem. Now, as they were in your inner office, the only people who could have got at them beside yourself were your assistants, so that it was pretty clear that one of them, at least, had something to do with the business. You told me that Worsfold was an excellent and intelligent draughtsman. Well, if such a man as that meditated treachery, he would probably be able to carry away the design in his head--at any rate, a little at a time--and would be under no necessity to run the risk of stealing a set of the drawings. But Ritter, you remarked, was an inferior sort of man, 'not particularly smart,' I think, were your words--only a mechanical sort of tracer. _He_ would be unlikely to be able to carry in his head the complicated details of such designs as yours, and, being in a subordinate position, and continually overlooked, he would find it impossible to make copies of the plans in the office. So that, to begin with, I thought I saw the most probable path to start on.

"When I looked round the rooms I pushed open the glass door of the barrier and left the door to the inner office ajar, in order to be able to see anything that _might_ happen in any part of the place, without actually expecting any definite development. While we were talking, as it happened, our friend Mirsky (or Hunter--as you please) came into the outer office, and my attention was instantly called to him by the first thing he did. Did you notice anything peculiar yourself?"

"No, really I can't say I did. He seemed to behave much as any traveller or agent might."

"Well, what I noticed was the fact that as soon as he entered the place he put his walking-stick into the umbrella stand, over there by the door, close by where he stood; a most unusual thing for a casual caller to do, before even knowing whether you were in. This made me watch him closely. I perceived, with increased interest, that the stick was exactly of the same kind and pattern as one already standing there; also a curious thing. I kept my eyes carefully on those sticks, and was all the more interested and edified to see, when he left, that he took the _other_ stick--not the one he came with--from the stand, and carried it away, leaving his own behind. I might have followed him, but I decided that more could be learnt by staying--as, in fact, proved to be the case. This, by-the-bye, is the stick he carried away with him. I took the liberty of fetching it back from Westminster, because I conceive it to be Ritter's property."

Hewitt produced the stick. It was an ordinary, thick Malacca cane, with a buckhorn handle and a silver band. Hewitt bent it across his knee, and laid it on the table.

"Yes," Dixon answered, "that is Ritter's stick. I think I have often seen it in the stand. But what in the world----"

"One moment; I'll just fetch the stick Mirsky left behind." And Hewitt stepped across the corridor.

He returned with another stick, apparently an exact facsimile of the other, and placed it by the side of the other.

"When your assistants went into the inner room, I carried this stick off for a minute or two. I knew it was not Worsfold's, because there was an umbrella there with his initial on the handle. Look at this."

Martin Hewitt gave the handle a twist, and rapidly unscrewed it from the top. Then it was seen that the stick was a mere tube of very thin metal, painted to appear like a Malacca cane.

"It was plain at once that this was no Malacca cane--it wouldn't bend. Inside it I found your tracings, rolled up tightly. You can get a marvellous quantity of thin tracing-paper into a small compass by tight rolling."

"And this--this was the way they were brought back!" the engineer exclaimed. "I see that, clearly. But how did they get away? That's as mysterious as ever."

"Not a bit of it. See here. Mirsky gets hold of Ritter, and they agree to get your drawings and photograph them. Ritter is to let his confederate have the drawings, and Mirsky is to bring them back as soon as possible, so that they shan't be missed for a moment. Ritter habitually carries this Malacca cane, and the cunning of Mirsky at once suggests that this tube should be made in outward facsimile. This morning, Mirsky keeps the actual stick and Ritter comes to the office with the tube. He seizes the first opportunity--probably when you were in this private room, and Worsfold was talking to you from the corridor--to get at the tracings, roll them up tightly, and put them in the tube, putting the tube back into the umbrella stand. At half-past twelve, or whenever it was, Mirsky turns up for the first time with the actual stick and exchanges them, just as he afterwards did when he brought the drawings back."

"Yes, but Mirsky came half an hour after they were--oh, yes, I see. What a fool I was! I was forgetting. Of course, when I first missed the tracings they were in this walking-stick, safe enough, and I was tearing my hair out within arm's reach of them!"

"Precisely. And Mirsky took them away before your very eyes. I expect Ritter was in a rare funk when he found that the drawings were missed. He calculated, no doubt, on your not wanting them for the hour or two they would be out of the office."

"How lucky that it struck me to jot a pencil-note on one of them! I might easily have made my note somewhere else, and then I should never have known that they had been away."

"Yes, they didn't give you any too much time to miss them. Well, I think the rest's pretty clear. I brought the tracings in here, screwed up the sham stick and put it back. You identified the tracings and found none missing, and then my course was pretty clear, though it

looked difficult. I knew you would be very naturally indignant with Ritter, so, as I wanted to manage him myself, I told you nothing of what he had actually done, for fear that, in your agitated state, you might burst out with something that would spoil my game. To Ritter I pretended to know nothing of the return of the drawings or _how_ they had been stolen--the only things I did know with certainty. But I _did_ pretend to know all about Mirsky--or Hunter--when, as a matter of fact, I knew nothing at all, except that he probably went under more than one name. That put Ritter into my hands completely. When he found the game was up he began with a lying confession. Believing that the tracings were still in the stick and that we knew nothing of their return, he said that they had not been away, and that he would fetch them--as I had expected he would. I let him go for them alone, and when he returned, utterly broken up by the discovery that they were not there, I had him altogether at my mercy. You see, if he had known that the drawings were all the time behind your book-case, he might have brazened it out, sworn that the drawings had been there all the time, and we could have done nothing with him. We couldn't have sufficiently frightened him by a threat of prosecution for theft, because there the things were, in your possession, to his knowledge.

"As it was, he answered the helm capitally: gave us Mirsky's address on the envelope, and wrote the letter that was to have got him out of the way while I committed burglary, if that disgraceful expedient had not been rendered unnecessary. On the whole, the case has gone very well."

"It has gone marvellously well, thanks to yourself. But what shall I do with Ritter?"

"Here's his stick--knock him downstairs with it, if you like. I should keep the tube, if I were you, as a memento. I don't suppose the respectable Mirsky will ever call to ask for it. But I should certainly kick Ritter out of doors--or out of window, if you like--without delay."

Mirsky was caught, and after two remands at the police-court was extradited on the charge of forging Russian notes. It came out that he had written to the Embassy, as Hewitt had surmised, stating that he had certain valuable information to offer, and the letter which Hewitt had seen delivered was an acknowledgment, and a request for more definite particulars. This was what gave rise to the impression that Mirsky had himself informed the Russian authorities of his forgeries. His real intent was very different, but was never guessed.

"I wonder," Hewitt has once or twice observed, "whether, after all, it would not have paid the Russian authorities better on the whole if I had never investigated Mirsky's little note-factory. The Dixon torpedo was worth a good many twenty-rouble notes."

=====

THE BABY PARTY

by F. Scott Fitzgerald

from the FadedPage etext of All the Sad Young Men 1926

A collection of FSF's magazine stories.

When John Andros felt old he found solace in the thought of life continuing through his child. The dark trumpets of oblivion were less loud at the patter of his child's feet or at the sound of his child's voice babbling mad non sequiturs to him over the telephone. The latter incident occurred every afternoon at three when his wife called the office from the country, and he came to look forward to it as one of the vivid minutes of his day.

He was not physically old, but his life had been a series of struggles up a series of rugged hills, and here at thirty-eight having won his battles against ill-health and poverty he cherished less than the usual number of illusions. Even his feeling about his little girl was qualified. She had interrupted his rather intense love-affair with his wife, and she was the reason for their living in a suburban town, where they paid for country air with endless servant troubles and the weary merry-go-round of the commuting train.

It was little Ede as a definite piece of youth that chiefly interested him. He liked to take her on his lap and examine minutely her fragrant, downy scalp and her eyes with their irises of morning blue. Having paid this homage John was content that the nurse should take her away. After ten minutes the very vitality of the child irritated him; he was inclined to lose his temper when things were broken, and one Sunday afternoon when she had disrupted a bridge game by permanently hiding up the ace of spades, he had made a scene that had reduced his wife to tears.

This was absurd and John was ashamed of himself. It was inevitable that such things would happen, and it was impossible that little Ede should spend all her indoor hours in the nursery up-stairs when she was becoming, as her mother said, more nearly a "real person" every day.

She was two and a half, and this afternoon, for instance, she was going to a baby party. Grownup Edith, her mother, had telephoned the information to the office, and little Ede had confirmed the business by shouting "I yam going to a _pantry_!" into John's unsuspecting left ear.

"Drop in at the Markeys' when you get home, won't you, dear?" resumed her mother. "It'll be funny. Ede's going to be all dressed up in her new pink dress-----"

The conversation terminated abruptly with a squawk which indicated that the telephone had been pulled violently to the floor. John laughed and decided to get an early train out; the prospect of a baby party in some one else's house amused him.

"What a peach of a mess!" he thought humorously. "A dozen mothers, and each one looking at nothing but her own child. All the babies breaking things and grabbing at the cake, and each mama going home thinking about the subtle superiority of her own child to every other child there."

He was in a good humor to-day--all the things in his life were going better than they had ever gone before. When he got off the train at his

station he shook his head at an importunate taxi man, and began to walk up the long hill toward his house through the crisp December twilight. It was only six o'clock but the moon was out, shining with proud brilliance on the thin sugary snow that lay over the lawns.

As he walked along drawing his lungs full of cold air his happiness increased, and the idea of a baby party appealed to him more and more. He began to wonder how Ede compared to other children of her own age, and if the pink dress she was to wear was something radical and mature. Increasing his gait he came in sight of his own house, where the lights of a defunct Christmas-tree still blossomed in the window, but he continued on past the walk. The party was at the Markeys' next door.

As he mounted the brick step and rang the bell he became aware of voices inside, and he was glad he was not too late. Then he raised his head and listened--the voices were not children's voices, but they were loud and pitched high with anger; there were at least three of them and one, which rose as he listened to a hysterical sob, he recognized immediately as his wife's.

"There's been some trouble," he thought quickly.

Trying the door, he found it unlocked and pushed it open.

* * * * *

The baby party began at half past four, but Edith Andros, calculating shrewdly that the new dress would stand out more sensationally against vestments already rumpled, planned the arrival of herself and little Ede for five. When they appeared it was already a flourishing affair. Four baby girls and nine baby boys, each one curled and washed and dressed with all the care of a proud and jealous heart, were dancing to the music of a phonograph. Never more than two or three were dancing at once, but as all were continually in motion running to and from their mothers for encouragement, the general effect was the same.

As Edith and her daughter entered, the music was temporarily drowned out by a sustained chorus, consisting largely of the word _cute_ and directed toward little Ede, who stood looking timidly about and fingering the edges of her pink dress. She was not kissed--this is the sanitary age--but she was passed along a row of mamas each one of whom said "cu-u-ute" to her and held her pink little hand before passing her on to the next. After some encouragement and a few mild pushes she was absorbed into the dance, and became an active member of the party.

Edith stood near the door talking to Mrs. Markey, and keeping one eye on the tiny figure in the pink dress. She did not care for Mrs. Markey; she considered her both snippy and common, but John and Joe Markey were congenial and went in together on the commuting train every morning, so the two women kept up an elaborate pretense of warm amity. They were always reproaching each other for "not coming to see me," and they were always planning the kind of parties that began with "You'll have to come to dinner with us soon, and we'll go in to the theatre," but never matured further.

"Little Ede looks perfectly darling," said Mrs. Markey, smiling and moistening her lips in a way that Edith found particularly repulsive. "So _grown-up_--I can't _believe_ it!"

Edith wondered if "little Ede" referred to the fact that Billy Markey, though several months younger, weighed almost five pounds more. Accepting a cup of tea she took a seat with two other ladies on a divan and launched into the real business of the afternoon, which of course lay in relating the recent accomplishments and insouciances of her child.

An hour passed. Dancing palled and the babies took to sterner sport. They ran into the dining-room, rounded the big table, and essayed the kitchen door, from which they were rescued by an expeditionary force of mothers. Having been rounded up they immediately broke loose, and rushing back to the dining-room tried the familiar swinging door again. The word "overheated" began to be used, and small white brows were dried with small white handkerchiefs. A general attempt to make the babies sit down began, but the babies squirmed off laps with peremptory cries of "Down! Down!" and the rush into the fascinating dining-room began anew.

This phase of the party came to an end with the arrival of refreshments, a large cake with two candles, and saucers of vanilla ice-cream. Billy Markey, a stout laughing baby with red hair and legs somewhat bowed, blew out the candles, and placed an experimental thumb on the white frosting. The refreshments were distributed, and the children ate, greedily but without confusion--they had behaved remarkably well all afternoon. They were modern babies who ate and slept at regular hours, so their dispositions were good, and their faces healthy and pink--such a peaceful party would not have been possible thirty years ago.

After the refreshments a gradual exodus began. Edith glanced anxiously at her watch--it was almost six, and John had not arrived. She wanted him to see Ede with the other children--to see how dignified and polite and intelligent she was, and how the only ice-cream spot on her dress was some that had dropped from her chin when she was joggled from behind.

"You're a darling," she whispered to her child, drawing her suddenly against her knee. "Do you know you're a darling? Do you _know_ you're a darling?"

Ede laughed. "Bow-wow," she said suddenly.

"Bow-wow?" Edith looked around. "There isn't any bow-wow."

"Bow-wow," repeated Ede. "I want a bow-wow."

Edith followed the small pointing finger.

"That isn't a bow-wow, dearest, that's a teddy-bear."

"Bear?"

"Yes, that's a teddy-bear, and it belongs to Billy Markey. You don't want Billy Markey's teddy-bear, do you?"

Ede did want it.

She broke away from her mother and approached Billy Markey, who held the toy closely in his arms. Ede stood regarding him with inscrutable eyes, and Billy laughed.

Grown-up Edith looked at her watch again, this time impatiently.

The party had dwindled until, besides Ede and Billy, there were only two babies remaining--and one of the two remained only by virtue of having hidden himself under the dining-room table. It was selfish of John not to come. It showed so little pride in the child. Other fathers had come, half a dozen of them, to call for their wives, and they had stayed for a while and looked on.

There was a sudden wail. Ede had obtained Billy's teddy-bear by pulling it forcibly from his arms, and on Billy's attempt to recover it, she had pushed him casually to the floor.

"Why, Edel!" cried her mother, repressing an inclination to laugh.

Joe Markey, a handsome, broad-shouldered man of thirty-five, picked up his son and set him on his feet. "You're a fine fellow," he said jovially. "Let a girl knock you over! You're a fine fellow."

"Did he bump his head?" Mrs. Markey returned anxiously from bowing the next to last remaining mother out the door.

"No-o-o-o," exclaimed Markey. "He bumped something else, didn't you, Billy? He bumped something else."

Billy had so far forgotten the bump that he was already making an attempt to recover his property. He seized a leg of the bear which projected from Ede's enveloping arms and tugged at it but without success.

"No," said Ede emphatically.

Suddenly, encouraged by the success of her former half-accidental manoeuvre, Ede dropped the teddy-bear, placed her hands on Billy's shoulders and pushed him backward off his feet.

This time he landed less harmlessly; his head hit the bare floor just off the rug with a dull hollow sound, whereupon he drew in his breath and delivered an agonized yell.

Immediately the room was in confusion. With an exclamation Markey hurried to his son, but his wife was first to reach the injured baby and catch him up into her arms.

"Oh, _Billy_, " she cried, "what a terrible bump! She ought to be spanked."

Edith, who had rushed immediately to her daughter, heard this remark, and her lips came sharply together.

"Why, Ede," she whispered perfunctorily, "you bad girl!"

Ede put back her little head suddenly and laughed. It was a loud laugh, a triumphant laugh with victory in it and challenge and contempt. Unfortunately it was also an infectious laugh. Before her mother realized the delicacy of the situation, she too had laughed, an audible, distinct laugh not unlike the baby's, and partaking of the same overtones.

Then, as suddenly, she stopped.

Mrs. Markey's face had grown red with anger, and Markey, who had been feeling the back of the baby's head with one finger, looked at her, frowning.

"It's swollen already," he said with a note of reproof in his voice. "I'll get some witch-hazel."

But Mrs. Markey had lost her temper. "I don't see anything funny about a child being hurt!" she said in a trembling voice.

Little Ede meanwhile had been looking at her mother curiously. She noted that her own laugh had produced her mother's, and she wondered if the same cause would always produce the same effect. So she chose this moment to throw back her head and laugh again.

To her mother the additional mirth added the final touch of hysteria to the situation. Pressing her handkerchief to her mouth she giggled irrepressibly. It was more than nervousness--she felt that in a peculiar way she was laughing with her child--they were laughing together.

It was in a way a defiance--those two against the world.

While Markey rushed up-stairs to the bathroom for ointment, his wife was walking up and down rocking the yelling boy in her arms.

"Please go home!" she broke out suddenly. "The child's badly hurt, and if you haven't the decency to be quiet, you'd better go home."

"Very well," said Edith, her own temper rising. "I've never seen any one make such a mountain out of----"

"Get out!" cried Mrs. Markey frantically. "There's the door, get out--I never want to see you in our house again. You or your brat either!"

Edith had taken her daughter's hand and was moving quickly toward the door, but at this remark she stopped and turned around, her face contracting with indignation.

"Don't you dare call her that!"

Mrs. Markey did not answer but continued walking up and down, muttering to herself and to Billy in an inaudible voice.

Edith began to cry.

"I will get out!" she sobbed, "I've never heard anybody so rude and c-common in my life. I'm glad your baby did get pushed down--he's nothing but a f-fat little fool anyhow."

Joe Markey reached the foot of the stairs just in time to hear this remark.

"Why, Mrs. Andros," he said sharply, "can't you see the child's hurt? You really ought to control yourself."

"Control m-myself!" exclaimed Edith brokenly. "You better ask her to c-control herself. I've never heard anybody so c-common in my life."

"She's insulting me!" Mrs. Markey was now livid with rage. "Did you hear what she said, Joe? I wish you'd put her out. If she won't go, just take her by the shoulders and put her out!"

"Don't you dare touch me!" cried Edith. "I'm going just as quick as I can find my c-coat!"

Blind with tears she took a step toward the hall. It was just at this moment that the door opened and John Andros walked anxiously in.

"John!" cried Edith, and fled to him wildly.

"What's the matter? Why, what's the matter?"

"They're--they're putting me out!" she wailed, collapsing against him. "He'd just started to take me by the shoulders and put me out. I want my coat!"

"That's not true," objected Markey hurriedly. "Nobody's going to put you out." He turned to John. "Nobody's going to put her out," he repeated. "She's----"

"What do you mean 'put her out'?" demanded John abruptly. "What's all this talk, anyhow?"

"Oh, let's go!" cried Edith. "I want to go. They're so _common_, John!"

"Look here!" Markey's face darkened. "You've said that about enough. You're acting sort of crazy."

"They called Ede a brat!"

For the second time that afternoon little Ede expressed emotion at an

inopportune moment. Confused and frightened at the shouting voices, she began to cry, and her tears had the effect of conveying that she felt the insult in her heart.

"What's the idea of this?" broke out John. "Do you insult your guests in your own house?"

"It seems to me it's your wife that's done the insulting!" answered Markey crisply. "In fact, your baby there started all the trouble."

John gave a contemptuous snort. "Are you calling names at a little baby?" he inquired. "That's a fine manly business!"

"Don't talk to him, John," insisted Edith. "Find my coat!"

"You must be in a bad way," went on John angrily, "if you have to take out your temper on a helpless little baby."

"I never heard anything so damn twisted in my life," shouted Markey. "If that wife of yours would shut her mouth for a minute----"

"Wait a minute! You're not talking to a woman and child now----"

There was an incidental interruption. Edith had been fumbling on a chair for her coat, and Mrs. Markey had been watching her with hot, angry eyes. Suddenly she laid Billy down on the sofa, where he immediately stopped crying and pulled himself upright, and coming into the hall she quickly found Edith's coat and handed it to her without a word. Then she went back to the sofa, picked up Billy, and rocking him in her arms looked again at Edith with hot, angry eyes. The interruption had taken less than half a minute.

"Your wife comes in here and begins shouting around about how common we are!" burst out Markey violently. "Well, if we're so damn common, you'd better stay away! And, what's more, you'd better get out now!"

Again John gave a short, contemptuous laugh.

"You're not only common," he returned, "you're evidently an awful bully--when there's any helpless women and children around." He felt for the knob and swung the door open. "Come on, Edith."

Taking up her daughter in her arms, his wife stepped outside and John, still looking contemptuously at Markey, started to follow.

"Wait a minute!" Markey took a step forward; he was trembling slightly, and two large veins on his temple were suddenly full of blood. "You don't think you can get away with that, do you? With me?"

Without a word John walked out the door, leaving it open.

Edith, still weeping, had started for home. After following her with his eyes until she reached her own walk, John turned back toward the lighted doorway where Markey was slowly coming down the slippery steps. He took

off his overcoat and hat, tossed them off the path onto the snow. Then, sliding a little on the iced walk, he took a step forward.

At the first blow, they both slipped and fell heavily to the sidewalk, half rising then, and again pulling each other to the ground. They found a better foothold in the thin snow to the side of the walk and rushed at each other, both swinging wildly and pressing out the snow into a pasty mud underfoot.

The street was deserted, and except for their short tired gasps and the padded sound as one or the other slipped down into the slushy mud, they fought in silence, clearly defined to each other by the full moonlight as well as by the amber glow that shone out of the open door. Several times they both slipped down together, and then for a while the conflict threshed about wildly on the lawn.

For ten, fifteen, twenty minutes they fought there senselessly in the moonlight. They had both taken off coats and vests at some silently agreed upon interval and now their shirts dripped from their backs in wet pulpy shreds. Both were torn and bleeding and so exhausted that they could stand only when by their position they mutually supported each other--the impact, the mere effort of a blow, would send them both to their hands and knees.

But it was not weariness that ended the business, and the very meaninglessness of the fight was a reason for not stopping. They stopped because once when they were straining at each other on the ground, they heard a man's footsteps coming along the sidewalk. They had rolled somehow into the shadow, and when they heard these footsteps they stopped fighting, stopped moving, stopped breathing, lay huddled together like two boys playing Indian until the footsteps had passed. Then, staggering to their feet, they looked at each other like two drunken men.

"I'll be damned if I'm going on with this thing any more," cried Markey thickly.

"I'm not going on any more either," said John Andros. "I've had enough of this thing."

Again they looked at each other, sulkily this time, as if each suspected the other of urging him to a renewal of the fight. Markey spat out a mouthful of blood from a cut lip; then he cursed softly, and picking up his coat and vest, shook off the snow from them in a surprised way, as if their comparative dampness was his only worry in the world.

"Want to come in and wash up?" he asked suddenly.

"No, thanks," said John. "I ought to be going home--my wife'll be worried."

He too picked up his coat and vest and then his overcoat and hat. Soaking wet and dripping with perspiration, it seemed absurd that less than half an hour ago he had been wearing all these clothes.

"Well--good night," he said hesitantly.

Suddenly they both walked toward each other and shook hands. It was no perfunctory hand-shake: John Andros's arm went around Markey's shoulder, and he patted him softly on the back for a little while.

"No harm done," he said brokenly.

"No--you?"

"No, no harm done."

"Well," said John Andros after a minute, "I guess I'll say good night."

"Good night."

Limping slightly and with his clothes over his arm, John Andros turned away. The moonlight was still bright as he left the dark patch of trampled ground and walked over the intervening lawn. Down at the station, half a mile away, he could hear the rumble of the seven o'clock train.

* * * * *

"But you must have been crazy," cried Edith brokenly. "I thought you were going to fix it all up there and shake hands. That's why I went away."

"Did you want us to fix it up?"

"Of course not, I never want to see them again. But I thought of course that was what you were going to do." She was touching the bruises on his neck and back with iodine as he sat placidly in a hot bath. "I'm going to get the doctor," she said insistently. "You may be hurt internally."

He shook his head. "Not a chance," he answered. "I don't want this to get all over town."

"I don't understand yet how it all happened."

"Neither do I." He smiled grimly. "I guess these baby parties are pretty rough affairs."

"Well, one thing--" suggested Edith hopefully, "I'm certainly glad we have beefsteak in the house for to-morrow's dinner."

"Why?"

"For your eye, of course. Do you know I came within an ace of ordering veal? Wasn't that the luckiest thing?"

Half an hour later, dressed except that his neck would accommodate no collar, John moved his limbs experimentally before the glass. "I believe

"I'll get myself in better shape," he said thoughtfully. "I must be getting old."

"You mean so that next time you can beat him?"

"I did beat him," he announced. "At least, I beat him as much as he beat me. And there isn't going to be any next time. Don't you go calling people common any more. If you get in any trouble, you just take your coat and go home. Understand?"

"Yes, dear," she said meekly. "I was very foolish and now I understand."

Out in the hall, he paused abruptly by the baby's door.

"Is she asleep?"

"Sound asleep. But you can go in and peek at her just to say good night."

They tiptoed in and bent together over the bed. Little Ede, her cheeks flushed with health, her pink hands clasped tight together, was sleeping soundly in the cool, dark room. John reached over the railing of the bed and passed his hand lightly over the silken hair.

"She's asleep," he murmured in a puzzled way.

"Naturally, after such an afternoon."

"Miz Andros," the colored maid's stage whisper floated in from the hall, "Mr. and Miz Markey down-stairs an' want to see you. Mr. Markey he's all cut up in pieces, mam'n. His face look like a roast beef. An' Miz Markey she 'pear mighty mad."

"Why, what incomparable nerve!" exclaimed Edith. "Just tell them we're not home. I wouldn't go down for anything in the world."

"You most certainly will." John's voice was hard and set.

"What?"

"You'll go down right now, and, what's more, whatever that other woman does, you'll apologize for what you said this afternoon. After that you don't ever have to see her again."

"Why--John, I can't."

"You've got to. And just remember that she probably hated to come over here just twice as much as you hate to go down-stairs."

"Aren't you coming? Do I have to go alone?"

"I'll be down--in just a minute."

John Andros waited until she had closed the door behind her; then he

reached over into the bed, and picking up his daughter, blankets and all, sat down in the rocking-chair holding her tightly in his arms. She moved a little, and he held his breath, but she was sleeping soundly, and in a moment she was resting quietly in the hollow of his elbow. Slowly he bent his head until his cheek was against her bright hair. "Dear little girl," he whispered. "Dear little girl, dear little girl."

John Andros knew at length what it was he had fought for so savagely that evening. He had it now, he possessed it forever, and for some time he sat there rocking very slowly to and fro in the darkness.

=====

FROM BEYOND

by H. P. Lovecraft

The Project Gutenberg eBook of The Fantasy Fan,
Volume 1, Number 10, June 1934

Horrible beyond conception was the change which had taken place in my best friend, Crawford Tillinghast. I had not seen him since that day, two months and a half before, when he had told me toward what goal his physical and metaphysical researches were leading; when he had answered my awed and almost frightened remonstrances by driving me from his laboratory and his house in a burst of fanatical rage, I had known that he now remained mostly shut in the attic laboratory with that accursed electrical machine, eating little and excluding even the servants, but I had not thought that a brief period of ten weeks could so alter and disfigure any human creature. It is not pleasant to see a stout man suddenly grown thin, and it is even worse when the baggy skin becomes yellowed or greyed, the eyes sunken, circled, and uncannily glowing, the forehead veined and corrugated, and the hands tremulous and twitching. And if added to this there be a repellant unkemptness; a wild disorder of dress, a bushiness of dark hair white at the roots, and an unchecked growth of white beard on a face once clean-shaven, the cumulative effect is quite shocking. But such was the aspect of Crawford Tillinghast on the night his half coherent message brought me to his door after my weeks of exile; such was the spectre that trembled as it admitted me, candle in hand, and glanced furtively over its shoulder as if fearful of unseen things in the ancient, lonely house set back from Benevolent Street.

That Crawford Tillinghast should ever have studied science and philosophy was a mistake. These things should be left to the frigid and impersonal investigator for they offer two equally tragic alternatives to the man of feeling and action; despair, if he fail in his quest, and terrors unutterable and unimaginable if he succeed. Tillinghast had once been the prey of failure, solitary and melancholy; but now I knew, with nauseating fears of my own, that he was the prey of success. I had indeed warned him ten weeks before, when he burst forth with his tale of what he felt himself about to discover. He had been flushed and excited then, talking in a high and unnatural, though always pedantic, voice.

"What do we know," he had said, "of the world and the universe about us? Our means of receiving impressions are absurdly few, and our notions of surrounding objects infinitely narrow. We see things only as we are constructed to see them, and can gain no idea of their absolute nature. With five feeble senses we pretend to comprehend the boundlessly complex cosmos, yet other beings with a wider, stronger, or different range of senses might not only see very differently the things we see, but might see and study whole worlds of matter, energy, and life which lie close at hand yet can never be detected with the senses we have. I have always believed that such strange, inaccessible worlds exist at our very elbows, _and now I believe I have found a way to break down the barriers_. I am not joking. Within twenty-four hours that machine near the table will generate waves acting on unrecognized sense-organs that exist in us as atrophied or rudimentary vestiges. Those waves will open up to us many vistas unknown to man, and several unknown to anything we consider organic life. We shall see that at which dogs howl in the dark, and that at which cats prick up their ears after midnight. We shall see these things, and other things which no breathing creature has yet seen. We shall overleap time, space, and dimensions, and without bodily motion peer to the bottom of creation."

When Tillinghast said these things I remonstrated, for I knew him well enough to be frightened rather than amused; but he was a fanatic, and drove me from the house. Now he was no less a fanatic, but his desire to speak had conquered his resentment, and he had written me imperatively in a hand I could scarcely recognize. As I entered the abode of the friend so suddenly metamorphosed to a shivering gargoyle, I became infected with the terror which seemed stalking in all the shadows. The words and beliefs expressed ten weeks before seemed bodied forth in the darkness beyond the small circle of candle light, and I sickened at the hollow, altered voice of my host. I wished the servants were about, and did not like it when he said they had all left three days previously. It seemed strange that old Gregory, at least, should desert his master without telling as tried a friend as I. It was he who had given me all the information I had of Tillinghast after I was repulsed in rage.

Yet I soon subordinated all my fears to my growing curiosity and fascination. Just what Crawford Tillinghast now wished of me I could only guess, but that he had some stupendous secret or discovery to impart, I could not doubt. Before I had protested at his unnatural prying into the unthinkable; now that he had evidently succeeded to some degree I almost shared his spirit, terrible though the cost of victory appeared. Up through the dark emptiness of the house I followed the bobbing candle in the hand of this shaking parody of man. The electricity seemed to be turned off, and when I asked my guide he said it was for a definite reason.

"It would be too much.... I would not dare," he continued to mutter. I especially noted his new habit of muttering, for it was not like him to talk to himself. We entered the laboratory in the attic, and I observed that detestable electrical machine, glowing with a sickly, sinister violet luminosity. It was connected with a powerful chemical

battery, but seemed to be receiving no current; for I recalled that in its experimental stage it had sputtered and purred when in action. In reply to my question Tillinghast mumbled that this permanent glow was not electrical in any sense that I could understand.

He now seated me near the machine, so that it was on my right, and turned a switch somewhere below the crowning cluster of glass bulbs. The usual sputtering began, turned to a whine, and terminated in a drone so soft as to suggest a return to silence. Meanwhile the luminosity increased, waned again, then assumed a pale, outre colour or blend of colours which I could neither place nor describe. Tillinghast had been watching me, and noted my puzzled expression.

"Do you know what that is?" he whispered, "_that is ultra-violet_." He chuckled oddly at my surprise. "You thought ultra-violet was invisible, and so it is--but you can see that and many other invisible things _now_."

"Listen to me! The waves from that thing are waking a thousand sleeping senses in us; senses which we inherit from aeons of evolution from the state of detached electrons to the state of organic humanity. I have seen _truth_, and I intend to show it to you. Do you wonder how it will seem? I will tell you." Here Tillinghast seated himself directly opposite me, blowing out his candle and staring hideously into my eyes. "Your existing sense-organs--ears first, I think--will pick up many of the impressions, for they are closely connected with the dormant organs. Then there will be others. You have heard of the pineal gland? I laugh at the shallow endocrinologist, fellow-dupe and fellow-parvenu of the Freudian. That gland is the great sense organ of organs--_I have found out_. It is like sight in the end, and transmits visual pictures to the brain. If you are normal, that is the way you ought to get most of it.... I mean get most of the evidence _from beyond_."

I looked about the immense attic room with the sloping south wall, dimly lit by rays which the every-day eye cannot see. The far corners were all shadows, and the whole place took on a hazy unreality which obscured its nature and invited the imagination to symbolism and phantasm. During the interval that Tillinghast was silent I fancied myself in some vast and incredible temple of long-dead gods; some vague edifice of innumerable black stone columns reaching up from a floor of damp slabs to a cloudy height beyond the range of my vision. The picture was very vivid for a while, but gradually gave way to a more horrible conception; that of utter, absolute solitude in infinite, sightless, soundless space. There seemed to be a void, and nothing more, and I felt a childish fear which prompted me to draw from my hip pocket the revolver I always carried after dark since the night I was held up in East Providence. Then, from the farthest regions of remoteness, the _sound_ softly glided into existence. It was infinitely faint, subtly vibrant, and unmistakably musical, but held a quality of surpassing wildness which made its impact feel like a delicate torture of my whole body. I felt sensations like those one feels when accidentally scratching ground glass. Simultaneously there developed something like a cold draught, which apparently swept past me from the direction of the distant sound. As I waited breathlessly I perceived

that both sound and wind were increasing; the effect being to give me an odd notion of myself as tied to a pair of rails in the path of a gigantic approaching locomotive. I began to speak to Tillinghast, and as I did so all the unusual impressions abruptly vanished. I saw only the man, the glowing machine, and the dim apartment. Tillinghast was grinning repulsively at the revolver which I had almost unconsciously drawn, but from his expression I was sure he had seen and heard as much as I, if not a great deal more. I whispered what I had experienced and he bade me remain as quiet and receptive as possible.

"Don't move," he cautioned, "for in these rays _we are able to be seen as well as to see_. I told you the servants left, but I didn't tell you _how_. It was that thick-witted housekeeper--she turned on the lights downstairs after I had warned her not to, and the wires picked up sympathetic vibrations. It must have been frightful--I could hear the screams up here in spite of all I was seeing and hearing from another direction, and later it was rather awful to find those empty heaps of clothes around the house. Mrs. Updike's clothes were close to the front hall switch--that's how I know she did it. It got them all. But so long as we don't move we're fairly safe. Remember we're dealing with a hideous world in which we are practically helpless.... _Keep still!_"

The combined shock of the revelation and of the abrupt command gave me a kind of paralysis, and in my terror my mind again opened to the impressions coming from what Tillinghast called "_beyond_." I was now in a vortex of sound and motion, with confused pictures before my eyes. I saw the blurred outlines of the room, but from some point in space there seemed to be pouring a seething column of unrecognizable shapes or clouds, penetrating the solid roof at a point ahead and to the right of me. Then I glimpsed the temple-like effect again, but this time the pillars reached up into an aerial ocean of light, which sent down one blinding beam along the path of the cloudy column I had seen before. After that the scene was almost wholly kaleidoscopic, and in the jumble of sights, sounds, and unidentified sense-impressions I felt that I was about to dissolve or in some way lose the solid form. One definite flash I shall always remember. I seemed for an instant to behold a patch of strange night sky filled with shining, revolving spheres, and as it receded I saw that the glowing suns formed a constellation or galaxy of settled shape; this shape being the distorted face of Crawford Tillinghast. At another time I felt huge animate things brushing past me and occasionally _walking or drifting through my supposedly solid body_, and thought I saw Tillinghast look at them as though his better trained senses could catch them visually. I recalled what he had said of the pineal gland, and wondered what he saw with this preternatural eye.

Suddenly I myself became possessed of a kind of augmented sight. Over and above the luminous and shadowy chaos arose a picture which, though vague, held the elements of consistency and permanence. It was indeed somewhat familiar, for the unusual part was superimposed upon the usual terrestrial scene much as a cinema view may be thrown upon the painted curtain of a theater. I saw the attic laboratory, the electrical machine, and the unsightly form of Tillinghast opposite me; but of all the space unoccupied by familiar objects not one particle was vacant.

Indescribable shapes both alive and otherwise were mixed in disgusting disarray, and close to every known thing were whole worlds of alien, unknown entities. It likewise seemed that all the known things entered into the composition of other unknown things, and vice versa. Foremost among the living objects were inky, jellyish monstrosities which flabbily quivered in harmony with the vibrations from the machine.

They were present in loathsome profusion, and I saw to my horror that they _over-lapped_; that they were semi fluid and capable of passing through one another and through what we know as solids. These things were never still, but seemed ever floating about with some malignant purpose. Sometimes they appeared to devour one another, the attacker launching itself at its victim and instantaneously obliterating the latter from sight. Shudderingly I felt that I knew what had obliterated the unfortunate servants, and could not exclude the things from my mind as I strove to observe other properties of the newly visible world that lies unseen around us. But Tillinghast had been watching me, and was speaking.

"You see them? You see them? You see the things that float and flop about you and through you every moment of your life? You see the creatures that form what men call the pure air and the blue sky? Have I not succeeded in breaking down the barrier; have I not shown you worlds that no other living men have seen?" I heard his scream through the horrible chaos, and looked at the wild face thrust so offensively close to mine. His eyes were pits of flame, and they glared at me with what I now saw was overwhelming hatred. The machine droned detestably.

"You think those floundering things wiped out the servants? Fool, they are harmless! But the servants _are_ gone, aren't they? You tried to stop me; you discouraged me when I needed every drop of encouragement I could get; you were afraid of the cosmic truth, you damned coward, but now I've got you! What swept up the servants? What made them scream so loud?... Don't know, eh! You'll know soon enough. Look at me--listen to what I say--do you suppose there are really any such things as time and magnitude. Do you fancy there are such things as form or matter. I tell you, I have struck depths that your little brain can't picture. I have seen beyond the bounds of infinity and drawn down demons from the stars.... I have harnessed the shadows that stride from world to world to sow death and madness.... Space belongs to me, do you hear? Things are hunting me now--the things that devour and dissolve--but I know how to elude them. It is you they will get, as they got the servants.... Stirring, dear sir? I told you it was dangerous to move, I have saved you so far by telling you to keep still--saved you to see more sights and to listen to me. If you had moved, they would have been at you long ago. Don't worry, they won't _hurt_ you. They didn't hurt the servants--it was the _seeing_ that made the poor devils scream so. My pets are not pretty, for they come out of places where aesthetic standards are--_very different_. Disintegration is quite painless, I assure you--_but_ I want you to see them_. I almost saw them, but I knew how to stop. You are not curious? I always knew you were no scientist. Trembling, eh. Trembling with anxiety to see the ultimate things I have discovered. Why don't you move, then? Tired? Well, don't worry, my friend, _for_ they are coming_.... Look, look, curse you, look ... it's just over your left shoulder...."

What remains to be told is very brief, and may be familiar to you from the newspaper accounts. The police heard a shot in the old Tillinghast house and found us there--Tillinghast dead and me unconscious. They arrested me because the revolver was in my hand, but released me in three hours, after they found that it was apoplexy which had finished Tillinghast and saw that my shot had been directed at the noxious machine which now lay hopelessly shattered on the laboratory floor. I did not tell very much of what I had seen, for I feared the coroner would be skeptical; but from the evasive outline I did give, the doctor told me that I had undoubtedly been hypnotised by the vindictive and homicidal madman.

I wish I could believe that doctor. It would help my shaky nerves if I could dismiss what I now have to think of the air and the sky about and above me. I never feel alone or comfortable, and a hideous sense of pursuit sometimes comes chillingly on me when I am weary. What prevents me from believing the doctor is this one simple fact--that the police never found the bodies of those servants whom they say Crawford Tillinghast murdered.

=====

The Missing Will

Hercule Poirot Solves an Extraordinary Case
by Agatha Christie

[Transcriber's Note: This Project Gutenberg etext is a story which appeared in the January, 1925 issue of The Blue Book Magazine.]

The problem presented to us by Miss Violet Marsh made a rather pleasant change from our usual routine work. Poirot had received a brisk and businesslike note from the lady asking for an appointment, and he had replied, asking her to call upon him at eleven o'clock the following day.

She arrived punctually—a tall, handsome young woman, plainly but neatly dressed, with an assured and businesslike manner—clearly, a young woman who meant to get on in the world. I am not a great admirer of the so-called New Woman myself, and in spite of her good looks, I was not particularly prepossessed in her favor.

“My business is of a somewhat unusual nature, M. Poirot,” she began, after she had accepted a chair. “I had better begin at the beginning and tell you the whole story.”

“If you please, mademoiselle.”

“I am an orphan. My father was one of two brothers, sons of a small yeoman farmer in Devonshire. The farm was a poor one, and the eldest brother, Andrew, emigrated to Australia, where he did very well

indeed, and by means of successful speculation in land became a very rich man. The younger brother, Roger, my father, had no leanings toward the agricultural life. He managed to educate himself a little, and obtained a post as a clerk in a small firm. He married slightly above him; my mother was the daughter of a poor artist. My father died when I was six years old. When I was fourteen, my mother followed him to the grave. My only living relation then was my Uncle Andrew, who had recently returned from Australia and bought a small place in his native county, Crabtree Manor. He was exceedingly kind to his brother's orphan child, took me to live with him, and treated me in every way as though I were his own daughter.

"Crabtree Manor," she pursued, "in spite of its name, is really only an old farmhouse. Farming was in my uncle's blood, and he was intensely interested in various modern farming experiments. Although kindness itself to me, he had certain peculiar and deeply rooted ideas as to the upbringing of women. Himself a man of little or no education, though possessing remarkable shrewdness, he placed little value on what he called 'book knowledge.' He was especially opposed to the education of women. In his opinion, girls should learn practical housework and dairy work, be useful about the home, and have as little to do with book-learning as possible. He proposed to bring me up on these lines, to my bitter disappointment.

"I rebelled frankly. I knew that I possessed a good brain, and had absolutely no talent for domestic duties. My uncle and I had many bitter arguments on the subject, for though much attached to each other, we were both self-willed. I was lucky enough to win a scholarship, and up to a certain point was successful in getting my own way. The crisis arose when I resolved to go to Girton. I had a little money of my own, left me by my mother, and I was quite determined to make the best use of the gifts God had given me. I had one long final argument with my uncle. He put the facts plainly before me. He had no other relations, and he had intended me to be his sole heiress. As I have told you, he was a very rich man. If I persisted in these 'newfangled notions' of mine, however, I need look for nothing from him. I remained polite, but firm. I should always be deeply attached to him, but I must lead my own life. We parted on that note. 'You fancy your brains, my girl,' were his last words. 'I've no book-learning, but for all that, I'll pit mine against yours any day. We'll see what we shall see.'

* * * * *

"That was nine years ago. I have stayed with him for a week-end occasionally, and our relations were perfectly amicable, though his views remained unaltered. He never referred to my having matriculated, nor to my B. Sc. For the last three years his health has been failing, and a month ago he died. I am now coming to the point of my visit. My uncle left a most extraordinary will. By its terms, Crabtree Manor and its contents are to be at my disposal for a year from his death—'during which time my clever niece may prove her wits,' the actual words run. At the end of that period, 'my wits having proved better than hers,' the house and all my uncle's large fortune pass to

various charitable institutions.”

“That is a little hard on you, mademoiselle,” commented Poirot, “seeing that you were Mr. Marsh’s only blood relation.”

“I do not look on it in that way. Uncle Andrew warned me fairly, and I chose my own path. Since I would not fall in with his wishes, he was at perfect liberty to leave his money to whom he pleased.”

“Was the will drawn up by a lawyer?”

“No; it was written on a printed will-form and witnessed by the man and his wife who lived in the house and looked after my uncle.”

“There might be a possibility of upsetting such a will?”

“I would not even attempt to do such a thing.”

“You regard it, then, as a sporting challenge on the part of your uncle?”

“That is exactly how I look upon it.”

“It bears that interpretation, certainly,” said Poirot thoughtfully.

“Somewhere in this rambling old manor house your uncle has concealed either a sum of money in notes, or possibly a second will, and has given you a year in which to exercise your ingenuity to find it.”

“Exactly, M. Poirot, and I am paying you the compliment of assuming that your ingenuity will be greater than mine.”

“Eh, eh! But that is very charming of you. My gray cells are at your disposal. You have made no search yourself?”

“Only a cursory one, but I have too much respect for my uncle’s undoubted abilities to fancy that the task will be an easy one.”

“Have you the will, or a copy of it with you?”

Miss Marsh handed a document across the table. Poirot ran through it, nodding to himself.

“Made three years ago. Dated March 25, and the time is given also—eleven a. m.—that is very suggestive. It narrows the field of search. Assuredly it is another will we have to seek for. A will made even half an hour later would upset this. _Eh bien_, mademoiselle, it is a problem charming and ingenious that you have presented to me here. I shall have all the pleasure in the world in solving it for you. Granted that your uncle was a man of ability, his gray cells cannot have been of the quality of Hercule Poirot’s!”

(Really, Poirot’s vanity is blatant!)

“Fortunately, I have nothing of moment on hand at the minute. Hastings

and I will go down to Crabtree Manor tonight. The man and wife who attended on your uncle are still there, I presume?"

"Yes, their name is Baker."

* * * * *

The following morning saw us started on the hunt proper. We had arrived late the night before. Mr. and Mrs. Baker, having received a telegram from Miss Marsh, were expecting us. They were a pleasant couple, the man gnarled and pink-cheeked like a shriveled pippin, and his wife a woman of vast proportions and true Devonshire calm.

Tired with our journey, including an eight-mile drive from the station, we had retired at once to bed after a supper of roast chicken, apple pie and Devonshire cream. We had now disposed of an excellent breakfast, and were sitting in a small paneled room which had been the late Mr. Marsh's study and living-room. A roll-top desk stuffed with papers, all neatly docketed, stood against the wall, and a big leather armchair showed plainly that it had been its owner's constant resting-place. A big chintz-covered settee ran along the opposite wall, and the deep low window-seats were covered with the same faded chintz of an old-fashioned pattern.

"_Eh bien, mon ami_," said Poirot, lighting one of his tiny cigarettes, "we must map out our plan of campaign. Already I have made a rough survey of the house, but I am of opinion that any clue will be found in this room. We shall have to go through the documents in the desk with meticulous care. Naturally I do not expect to find the will among them, but it is likely that some apparently innocent paper may conceal the clue to its hiding-place. But first we must have a little information. Ring the bell, I pray of you."

* * * * *

I did so. While we were waiting for it to be answered, Poirot walked up and down, looking about him approvingly.

"A man of method, this Mr. Marsh. See how neatly the packets of papers are docketed; and the key to each drawer has its ivory label—so has the key of the china-cabinet on the wall. And see with what precision the china within is arranged! It rejoices the heart. Nothing here offends the eye—"

He came to an abrupt pause, as his eye was caught by the key of the desk itself, to which a dirty envelope was affixed. Poirot frowned at it, and withdrew it from the lock. On it were scrawled the words "_Key of Roll-top Desk_" in a crabbed handwriting quite unlike the neat superscriptions on the other keys.

"An alien note," said Poirot, frowning. "I could swear that here we have no longer the personality of Mr. Marsh. But who else has been in the house? Only Miss Marsh; and she, if I mistake not, is also a young lady of method and order."

Baker came in answer to the bell.

"Will you fetch Madame your wife and answer a few questions?"

Baker departed, and in a few moments returned with Mrs. Baker, wiping her hands on her apron and beaming all over her face.

In a few clear words, Poirot set forth the object of his mission. The Bakers were immediately sympathetic.

"Us don't want to see Miss Violet done out of what's hers," declared the woman. "Cruel hard, 'twould be, for hospitals to get it all."

Poirot proceeded with his questions. Yes, Mr. and Mrs. Baker remembered perfectly witnessing the will. Baker had previously been sent into the neighboring town to get two printed will-forms.

"Two?" said Poirot sharply.

"Yes sir, for safety like, I suppose, in case he should spoil one—and sure enough, so he did do. Us had signed one—"

"What time of day was that?"

Baker scratched his head, but his wife was quicker.

"Why, to be sure, I'd just put the milk on for the cocoa at eleven. Don't ee remember? It had all boiled over on the stove when us got back to kitchen."

"And afterward?"

"'Twould be about an hour later. Us had to go in again. 'I've made a mistake,' says old Master, '—had to tear the whole thing up. I'll trouble you to sign again.' And us did. And afterward Master give us a tidy sum of money each. 'I've left you nothing in my will,' says he, 'but each year I live, you'll have this to be a nest-egg when I'm gone,' and sure enough, so he did."

Poirot reflected.

"After you had signed the second time, what did Mr. Marsh do? Do you know?"

"Went out to the village to pay tradesmen's books."

* * * * *

That did not seem very promising. Poirot tried another tack. He held out the key of the desk.

"Is that your master's writing?"

I may have imagined it, but I fancied that a moment or two elapsed before Baker replied: "Yes sir, it is."

"He's lying," I thought. "But why?"

"Has your master let the house? Have there been any strangers in it during the last three years?"

"No sir."

"No visitors?"

"Only Miss Violet."

"No strangers of any kind been inside this room?"

"No sir."

"You forget the workmen, Jim," his wife reminded him.

"Workmen?" Poirot wheeled round on her. "What workmen?"

The woman explained that about two years and a half ago workmen had been in the house to do certain repairs. She was quite vague as to what the repairs were. Her view seemed to be that the whole thing was a fad of her master's, and quite unnecessary. Part of the time the workmen had been in the study, but what they had done there she could not say, as her master had not let either of them into the room while the work was in progress. Unfortunately they could not remember the name of the firm employed, beyond the fact that it was a Plymouth one.

"We progress, Hastings," said Poirot, rubbing his hands, as the Bakers left the room. "Clearly he made a second will, and then had workmen from Plymouth in to make a suitable hiding-place. Instead of wasting time, taking up the floor and tapping the walls, we will go to Plymouth."

* * * * *

With a little trouble we were able to get the information we wanted. And after one or two essays, we found the firm employed by Mr. Marsh.

Their employees had all been with them many years, and it was easy to find the two men who had worked under Mr. Marsh's orders. They remembered the job perfectly. Among various other minor jobs, they had taken up one of the bricks of the old-fashioned fireplace, made a cavity beneath, and so cut the brick that it was impossible to see the joint. By pressing on the second brick from the end, the whole thing was raised. It had been quite a complicated piece of work, and the old gentleman had been very fussy about it. Our informant was a man called Cogan, a big, gaunt man with a grizzled mustache. He seemed an intelligent fellow.

We returned to Crabtree Manor in high spirits, and locking the study

door, proceeded to put our newly acquired knowledge into effect. It was impossible to see any sign on the bricks, but when we pressed in the manner indicated, a deep cavity was at once disclosed.

Eagerly Poirot plunged in his hand. Suddenly his face fell from complacent elation to consternation. All he held was a charred fragment of stiff paper. But for it, the cavity was empty.

“_Sacré_,” cried Poirot angrily. “Some one has been here before us!”

We examined the scrap of paper anxiously. Clearly it was a fragment of what we sought. A portion of Baker’s signature remained, but no indication of what the terms of the will had been.

Poirot sat back on his heels.

“I understand it not,” he growled. “Who destroyed this? And what was their object?”

“The Bakers?” I suggested.

“_Pourquoi?_ Neither will makes any provision for them, and they are more likely to be kept on with Miss Marsh than if the place became the property of a hospital. How could it be to anyone’s advantage to destroy the will? The hospitals benefit, yes; but one cannot suspect institutions!”

“Perhaps the old man changed his mind and destroyed it himself,” I suggested.

Poirot rose to his feet, dusting his knees with his usual care.

“That may be,” he admitted. “One of your more sensible observations, Hastings. Well, we can do no more here. We have done all that mortal man can do. We have successfully pitted our wits against the late Andrew Marsh, but unfortunately his niece is no better off for our success.”

* * * * *

By driving to the station at once, we were just able to catch a train to London, though not the principal express. Poirot was sad and dissatisfied. For my part, I was tired and dozed in a corner. Suddenly, as we were just moving out of Taunton, Poirot uttered a piercing squeal.

“_Vite_, Hastings! Awake and jump. But jump, I say!”

Before I knew where I was, we were standing on the platform, bareheaded and minus our valises, while the train disappeared into the night. I was furious, but Poirot paid no attention.

“Imbecile that I have been!” he cried. “Triple imbecile! Not again will I vaunt my little gray cells!”

"That's a good job, at any rate," I said grumpily. "But what is this all about?"

As usual, when following out his own ideas, he paid absolutely no attention to me.

"The tradesmen's books, I have left them entirely out of account! Yes, but where? Where? Never mind, I cannot be mistaken. We must return at once."

Easier said than done. We managed to get a slow train to Exeter, and there Poirot hired a car. We arrived back at Crabtree Manor in the small hours of the morning. I pass over the bewilderment of the Bakers when we had at last aroused them. Paying no attention to anybody, Poirot strode at once to the study.

"I have been, not a triple imbecile, but thirty-six times one, my friend," he dignified to remark. "Now, behold!"

Going straight to the desk, he drew out the key, and detached the envelope from it. I stared at him stupidly. How could he possibly hope to find a big will-form in that tiny envelope? With great care he cut open the envelope, laying it out flat. Then he lighted the fire and held the plain inside surface of the envelope to the flame. In a few minutes faint characters began to appear.

"Look!" cried Poirot in triumph.

I looked. There were just a few lines of faint writing stating briefly that he left everything to his niece Violet Marsh. It was dated March 25, twelve-thirty p. m., and witnessed by Albert Pike, confectioner, and Jessie Pike, married woman.

"But is it legal?" I gasped.

"As far as I know, there is no law against writing your will in a blend of disappearing and sympathetic ink. The intention of the testator is clear, and the beneficiary is his only living relation. But the cleverness of him! He foresaw every step that a searcher would take, that I, miserable imbecile, took! He gets two will-forms, makes the servants sign twice, then sallies out with his will written on the inside of a dirty envelope, and a fountain pen containing his little ink-mixture. On some excuse he gets the confectioner and his wife to sign their names under his own signature; then he ties it to the key of his desk and chuckles to himself. If his niece sees through his little ruse, she will have justified her choice of life and elaborate education and be thoroughly welcome to his money."

"She didn't see through it, did she?" I said slowly. "It seems rather unfair. The old man really won."

"But no, Hastings! It is your wits that go astray. Miss Marsh proved the astuteness of her wits and the value of the higher education for

women by at once putting the matter in _my_ hands. Always employ the expert! She has amply proved her right to the money."

I wonder—I very much wonder what old Andrew Marsh would have thought!

=====

THE LAUGH MAKER

by James Oliver Curwood
Author of "The Blind God," etc.

[Transcriber's Note: This Project Gutenberg etext
is a story which appeared in the April, 1912 issue of
The Red Book Magazine.]

You can laugh too much. You can be too cheerful. You can look too much on the sunny side of life. You wont believe this and neither did Bobby McTabb. But McTabb proved it out. It took the girl to help him—Kitty Duchene was her name—tall and sweet to look upon, with those pure blue eyes, dark with the beauty of violets, that go so well with hair which is brown in the shadow and gold in the sun. They proved it out together, all of a sudden. It is their story. And it will never be believed. But it's the truth.

Bobby McTabb was born fat. He weighed fourteen pounds at the start—and kept going. He doubled up his avoirdupois at the end of the tenth month, was a fraternity joke at college in his twentieth year, and made the scales groan under two hundred and eighty pounds at the end of his thirtieth—when he came to Fawcettville. But don't let these facts prejudice you against Bobby McTabb. At least don't let them give you a wrong steer. For Bobby McTabb, in spite of his fat, was a live one. Fawcettville woke up the day he arrived and began to scrape off the age-old moss from round the hubs of its village institutions. For rumor had preceded Bobby McTabb. It endowed him with immense wealth. He was going to boom Fawcettville. The oldest inhabitants gathered in groups and discussed possibilities, while their sons and younger relations worked in the hay and wheat fields. Some believed a railroad was coming that way. Others that a big factory, like those in the cities, was to be built. A few smelled oil, and Bobby McTabb's first appearance gave weight to every dream that had been dreamed. The villagers had never seen anything like him, from his patent leather shoes and his gaudily striped waistcoat to his round, rosy, laughing face. He was so fat that he appeared to be short, though he was above medium height, and everyone agreed at first glance that no soul less than that of a millionaire could possibly abide within this earthly tabernacle that disclosed itself to their eyes. But Bobby McTabb quickly set all rumors at rest. He had come to found a bank—the first bank in Fawcettville. At that minute he had just one hundred and twenty-seven dollars in his pocket. But he said nothing of that.

How Bobby McTabb started his bank has nothing to do with this story. But he did it—inside of a week, and prospered. The first part of the

story is how he won Confidence—and met the girl. It was his fat, and his round, rosy, laughing face that counted. Within a month all the men liked him, the children loved him, and mothers and daughters were ready to trust him with anything. And never for an instant did Bobby betray one of their trusts. He was lovable from the boots up, and grew fatter in his prosperity as the months rolled by. He discarded his gaudy attire, and did as the other Romans did—wore a broad-brimmed “haying” hat in summer, “wash shirts,” and seamless trousers. He joined the village church, was elected Sunday-school superintendent without a dissenting vote, and was soon the heart and soul of every country rollicking-bee for miles around. Bobby woke up every morning with a laugh in his soul and a smile on his boyish face, and he carried that smile and laugh about with him through every hour of the day. He was happy. Everywhere he preached the gospel of happiness and optimism. If your heart was sick with a heavy burden it would lighten the moment you heard his laugh. And it was a glum face that wouldn’t break into a smile when it met Bobby McTabb’s coming round the corner.

It was at the end of his second year that Bobby met Kitty Duchene. What sweet-eyed, blue-eyed Kitty might not have done with him Fawcettville will never know. She liked him. She would have loved him, and married him, if he hadn’t been so fat. Anyway, grief didn’t settle very heavily upon those ponderous shoulders of B. McTabb. He never laughed a laugh less, and he didn’t stop for a minute in making other people laugh. It was his hobby, and all the women in the world couldn’t have broken it. “Make your neighbors laugh and you shall inherit the Kingdom of Heaven,” he used to say. “Drive out worry and care and you are clubbing the devil.” And so it came to pass that by the time he had spent three years in Fawcettville, Bobby McTabb was greater in his community than the governor of the state or the president of the nation. And this was the condition of affairs toward which Bobby had been planning.

And then, one morning, he was missing.

When the odds and ends of things had been counted out, and various columns checked up, it was found that just a hundred and forty thousand dollars had gone with Bobby McTabb.

II

It was the third of July that Bobby shook the dust of Fawcettville from his feet. So he had the third, and all day the fourth, which was a holiday, in which to get a good start.

Bobby was original, even in robbing a bank. In fact, this is not so much the story of a bank pillage as it is of Bobby’s originality. Europe, Monte Carlo, and Cape Town played as small parts in his plans as did Timbuctoo and Zanzibar. He loved his own people too well to go very far away from them. So he went to Duluth, where a launch was waiting for him. On the Fourth of July he set out alone along the northern shore up Superior, which is unbroken wilderness from Duluth to Fort William. Three days later a fisherman found McTabb’s boat

wrecked among the rocks, and on the shore near the launch were Bobby's coat and hat, sodden and pathetic. Of course there were cards and letters in the pockets of that coat, and also a roll of small bills. So identification was easy. Close on the lurid newspaper tales of Bobby McTabb's defalcation followed the still more thrilling story of his death. And, meanwhile, Bobby thought this the best joke of his life, and with a kit of supplies on his back was hiking straight North into the big timber.

The joke lived until about ten o'clock in the morning of the first day, when the whole affair began to appear a little less clever to Bobby McTabb. It was hot, and not one decent half-mile of travel did Bobby find. Up and down ridges of broken rock, through tangled swamps and forests of spruce and cedar he went, hitting it as straight north as a tenderfoot could make it by compass. The water poured down his round, red face, wet his collar first, and gradually soaked him to the tips of his toes. But it was not the heat that troubled him most. He was fat and succulent, as tender as a young chicken, and the black flies gathered from miles around to feast upon him. By noon his face was swollen until he could hardly see. His nose was like a bulb; his feet were blistered; a thousand bones and joints that he had never supposed were in the human anatomy began to ache, and for the first time in his life his jolly heart went _loco_, and he began to swear. The railroad was forty miles north. He had planned to reach that, and follow it to some small station, whence he would take a train into the new mining country that was just opening up, westward. It was a terrible forty miles. He would look at his compass, strike out confidently toward the North Pole, and five minutes later discover that he was traveling east or west. Early in the afternoon he got into a swamp of caribou moss that was like a spring bed, three feet thick, under his feet. It held him up nicely for a time, and the softness of it was as balm to his sore feet. Then he came to a place where a caribou would have sniffed, and turned back. But B. McTabb went on—and in. He went in—first to his knees, then to his middle, then to his neck, and by the time he had wallowed himself to the safety of firmer footing there was not a spot of him that was not covered with black mud. At two o'clock Bobby McTabb struck firm ground. He believed that he had traveled thirty-nine miles. But he made up his mind that he would camp, and make the last mile in the cool of the morning. As a matter of fact the lake was only six miles behind him.

When Bobby awoke on the morning of the second day he was so stiff that he waddled and so sore that he groaned aloud, and then he made the discovery—the alarming discovery—that was the beginning of the making of a new man of him. His rubber grub-bag was torn to shreds, and what was left of his provisions could have been gathered into a salt cellar. All about the front of his tent were tracks as big as a hat, and though he had never seen tracks like those before he knew that they were the visiting cards of a very big and a very hungry bear. "My Gawd!" said B. McTabb. "My Gawd!" he repeated over and over again, when he found nothing but crumbs and a bacon string.

Then he reflected that the railroad must be but a short distance away, and that he would surely strike some habitation or town before

dinner-time. His shoulders were sore, so he left his tent behind him, stopping every time he came to a saskatoon tree or a clump of wild raspberries. The fruit did very well for a time, but like many another tenderfoot before him, he did not learn until too late that the little red plums, or saskatoons, are as bad as green apples when taken into an uncultivated stomach. He began to suffer along toward noon. He suffered all of that day, and far into the night, and when the dawn of the second day came he was no longer the old Bobby McTabb, but a half-mad man. For three days after this the black flies fed on him and the fruit diet ate at his vitals. On the morning of the sixth day he came to the railroad, nearly blind, bootless, and starving, and was found by a tie-cutter named Cassidy. For a week he lay in Cassidy's cabin, and when at last he came to his feet again, and looked into a glass, he no longer recognized in himself the tenderly nurtured Bobby McTabb of Fawcettville. His round face had grown thin. A half-inch stubble of beard had pierced his chin and rosy cheeks. His eyes were wild and bloodshot, and there was a looseness in the waist of his trousers that made him gasp. Three days later he weighed himself at the little station up the line and found that he had lost sixty pounds.

[Illustration: On the morning of the sixth day he came to the railroad, nearly blind, bootless and starving.]

From this day on McTabb was a different man. He had relieved himself of sixty pounds of waste, and the effect was marvelous. A new spirit had entered into him by the time he reached the mining country. He prospered—and grew thinner. Unfortunately there is no moral lesson to this little history of B. McTabb. If he had been an ordinary runaway cashier he would have been caught and sufficiently punished, and all the good world would have been warned by his miserable end. But McTabb was not ordinary. He made money with the savings of Fawcettville. He made it so fast that it puzzled him at times to keep count of it. He turned over three claims in the first six months at a profit of a hundred thousand dollars. This was what optimistic Bobby called a “starter.” He was in a rough country, and once more he found himself doing as the Romans did. He worked, and worked hard; he wore heavy boots and shoe-packs, and the more he worked and the more he prospered the thinner he grew.

He was richer each day. Good things came to him like flies to sugar. At the end of his second year in the new bonanza country he was worth a million. And this was not all. For B. McTabb was no longer short and thick. He was tall and thin. From two hundred and eighty he had dropped to one hundred and sixty pounds, and he was five feet ten and a half in his cowhide boots.

But this is not the story of the beginning or the middle of Bobby McTabb. It is the story of his extraordinary and entirely original end, and of the manner in which pretty blue-eyed Kitty Duchene helped to bring that end about.

McTabb was no longer known by that name. He was J. Wesley Brown, promoter and mine owner, and as J. Wesley Brown he met Kitty Duchene

once more, in Winnipeg. Kitty was visiting a friend whose father had joined McTabb in a promoting scheme, and all of Bobby's old love returned to him, for in reality it had never died. The one thing that had been missing in his life was Kitty Duchene, and now he began to court her again as J. Wesley Brown. There was nothing about J. Wesley Brown that would remind one of B. McTabb, and of course Kitty did not recognize him. One day Bobby looked deep into Kitty's pure blue eyes and told her how much he loved her, and Kitty dropped her head a little forward, so that he could see nothing but the sheen of her gold-brown hair, and promised to be his wife.

[Illustration: Kitty dropped her head and promised to be his wife.]

From this day on more and more of the old Bobby began to show in J. Wesley Brown. He was the happiest man in the North. His old laugh came back, full and round and joyous. He often caught himself whistling the old tunes, telling the old stories, and cracking the old jokes that had made Fawcettville love him. One evening when he was waiting for Kitty, he whistled softly the tune to "Sweet Molly Malone" and when Kitty came quietly into the room her blue eyes searched his questioningly, and there was a gentleness in them which made him understand that the old song had gone straight home, for it was Kitty Duchene herself who had taught him the melody, years and years ago, it seemed. She had told him a great deal about Fawcettville, its green hills and its meadows, its ancient orchards and the great "bottoms," yellow and black with ox-eyed daisies. And tonight she said, with her pretty face very close to his: "I want to live back in the old home, Jim. Do you love me enough for that?"

The thrill in her voice, the soft touch of her hand, stirred Bobby's soul until it rose above all fear, and he promised. He would go back. But—what might happen then? Could he always live as J. Wesley Brown? Would no one ever recognize him? Trouble began to seat itself in his eyes. Misgivings began to fill him. And then, in one great dynamic explosion, the world was shattered about Bobby McTabb's ears.

He had taken Kitty to a carnival, and like two children they were stumbling through a "House of Mystery," losing themselves in its mazes, laughing until the tears glistened in Kitty's happy eyes, when they ran up against two mirrors. One of these made tall and thin people short and fat, and the other made short and fat people tall and thin. Before one of these stepped B. McTabb. For a moment he stood there stunned and helpless. Then he gave a sudden quick gasp and faced Kitty. There was no laughter now in the girl's eyes, but a look of horror and understanding. In that hapless moment Bobby's leanness was gone. He was the old Bobby again, short and ludicrously fat. The girl drew back, her breath breaking in sobbing agony.

"Robert," she cried accusingly. "Robert McTabb!"

She drew still farther away from him, and hopelessly he reached out his arms.

"Kitty—My God, let me explain," he pleaded. "You don't understand—"

But she was going from him, and he did not follow.

III

Now there were three things which might have happened to Bobby McTabb. In all justice Kitty should have immediately reported him to the authorities, but she loved him too much for that, and was too loyal to herself ever to see him again. Or, in the despair and hopelessness of the situation, Bobby might have paid penance by drowning himself or hanging himself. There was one other alternative—flight. But, as we have stated, Bobby was an original thief, and he did just what no other thief would have thought of doing.

He turned his properties into cash as quickly as he could, and bought a ticket for Fawcettville. He arrived in the village on a late night train, as he had planned. The place was deserted. People were asleep. With a big throb at his heart he saw that the building which he had once occupied was empty. It was just as he had left it on that third of July morning. Something rose in his throat and choked him as he turned away. After all he loved Fawcettville—loved it more than any other place on earth, and the tears came into his eyes as he passed reverently the old familiar spots, and came at last to Kitty Duchene's home, with the maples whispering mournfully above him. He almost sobbed aloud when he saw a light in Kitty's window. For a long time he sat under the maples, until the light went out and he could no longer see Kitty's shadow against the curtain. All about him were the homes of the people who had loved and trusted him, and he groaned aloud as he turned back.

No one in Fawcettville knew of Bobby McTabb's visit that night. No one in the world knew of the scheme which Bobby carried away with him. On the second day the owner of the bank building received a letter, signed by a stranger, asking him to clean and repair the old building, and enclosing an one-hundred dollar bill for the first quarter's rent. It was twice the rent Bobby McTabb had paid in the old days, and the mystery became the talk of the village.

Bobby came again on the late night train, got off at Henderson, three miles west of Fawcettville, and drove over in a rig. The rig was heavily laden with various things, but chiefly with a big gilt and gold lettered sign, such as Fawcettville had never known. There were a few who heard the driving of the midnight nails in that sign as it was hung over the new building. After that two men went through the village, as stealthily as thieves, and on every barn and store, and even on the fronts of houses, were pasted bills two feet square; and at dawn other messengers began delivering sealed letters to the farmers for miles around.

The first bright rays of the morning sun lighted up the gilt and gold letters on Bobby's sign, and those letters read:

ROBERT McTABB

Loans, Real Estate and Insurance

Sile Jenks, the milkman, was the first to read the bill in front of his house, and with a wild yell he began awakening his neighbors. Inside of half an hour Fawcettville was in an uproar. Men and women came hurrying toward the old bank building, and in front of that building, with a happy smile on his face, stood Bobby McTabb. Men rushed up to him and wrung his hands until it seemed as though they must pull out his arms; women crowded through to his side; children shouted out his old name; the dogs barked in the old way—he heard the old laughter, the old voices, the old greetings—even deeper and more affectionate now; and then there came the first rigs from the country, followed by others, until they streamed in from all sides, just as they do when a circus comes to town. For three hours Bobby stood up manfully, and then the climax came; for straight up to him, with glorious, shining eyes and love in her face, came Kitty Duchene. She paid no attention to those about them, but put her arms up about Bobby's neck and kissed him.

"NOW I understand," she whispered, looking at him proudly. "But why didn't you tell me—up there, Robert?"

And for the first time in his life Bobby McTabb's voice choked him until he could not speak.

This was what the people of Fawcettville and the country round had read on Bobby's bills and in his letters:

Dear old friends—

You will remember one summer day, nearly five years ago, when I came into your town—Bobby McTabb. I was without friends, without introductions, without money—but you will remember, too, how you received me with open arms, and for two years made life for me here happier than any life that I had ever dreamed might exist for me. You made me love you, as I would have loved my father, my mother, my sister; and I schemed and schemed to think of some way in which I could repay you. At last the time came. I saw an opportunity of making a great deal of money, but to make that money I required a large sum in cash. I believe that most of you would have responded to my call for that cash—but, perhaps foolishly, I had the childish desire TO SURPRISE YOU. So I went away and took your money with me. I have realized, since then, that the joke was not a good one—but never for an instant have I believed that you would lose confidence in me.

Dear old friends, what I went away to achieve I HAVE achieved, and my heart is near bursting with joy at the knowledge that once more I am to be one of you—until the end of life. Friends, I took with me just one hundred and forty thousand dollars of your money, and I have brought you back just six dollars for every one that you have

loaned me during that time. Is this work well done? Is it, at last, a proof of the deep love and reverence I hold for you all? I have the money in cash, and every depositor of the old bank, when he calls upon me, will receive just seven dollars in place of every dollar he had deposited.

But it is not money, but love, that counts, dear friends, and I ask that you measure me—not by the gift I am making to Fawcettville—but in that almost immeasurable devotion which I hold for you all.

Affectionately,
Bobby McTabb.

=====

THE RECRUIT

by Bryce Walton

It was dirty work, but it would
make him a man. And kids had a
right to grow up--some of them!

[Transcriber's Note: This Project Gutenberg
etext was produced from
Worlds of If Science Fiction, July 1962.
Extensive research did not uncover any evidence that
the U.S. copyright on this publication was renewed.]

Wayne, unseen, sneered down from the head of the stairs.

The old man with his thick neck, thick cigar, evening highball, potgut and bald head without a brain in it. His slim mother with nervously polite smiles and voice fluttering, assuring the old man by her frailty that he was big in the world. They were squareheads one and all, marking moron time in a gray dream. Man, was he glad to break out.

The old man said, "He'll be okay. Let him alone."

"But he won't eat. Just lies there all the time."

"Hell," the old man said. "Sixteen's a bad time. School over, waiting for the draft and all. He's in between. It's rough."

Mother clasped her forearms and shook her head once slowly.

"We got to let him go, Eva. It's a dangerous time. You got to remember about all these dangerous repressed impulses piling up with nowhere to go, like they say. You read the books."

"But he's unhappy."

"Are we specialists? That's the Youth Board's headache, ain't it? What do we know about adolescent trauma and like that? Now get dressed or we'll be late."

Wayne watched the ritual, grinning. He listened to their purposeless noises, their blabbing and yakking as if they had something to say. Blab-blab about the same old bones, and end up chewing them in the same old ways. Then they begin all over again. A freak sideshow all the way to nowhere. Squareheads going around either unconscious or with eyes looking dead from the millennium in the office waiting to retire into limbo.

How come he'd been stuck with parental images like that? One thing--when he was jockeying a rocket to Mars or maybe firing the pants off Asiatic reds in some steamy gone jungle paradise, he'd forget his punkie origins in teeveeland.

But the old man was right on for once about the dangerous repressed impulses. Wayne had heard about it often enough. Anyway there was no doubt about it when every move he made was a restrained explosion. So he'd waited in his room, and it wasn't easy sweating it out alone waiting for the breakout call from HQ.

"Well, dear, if you say so," Mother said, with the old resigned sigh that must make the old man feel like Superman with a beerbelly.

They heard Wayne slouching loosely down the stairs and looked up.

"Relax," Wayne said. "You're not going anywhere tonight."

"What, son?" his old man said uneasily. "Sure we are. We're going to the movies."

He could feel them watching him, waiting; and yet still he didn't answer. Somewhere out in suburban grayness a dog barked, then was silent.

"Okay, go," Wayne said. "If you wanta walk. I'm taking the family boltbucket."

"But we promised the Clemons, dear," his mother said.

"Hell," Wayne said, grinning straight into the old man. "I just got my draft call."

He saw the old man's Adam's apple move. "Oh, my dear boy," Mother cried out.

"So gimme the keys," Wayne said. The old man handed the keys over. His understanding smile was strained, and fear flicked in his sagging eyes.

"Do be careful, dear," his mother said. She ran toward him as he laughed and shut the door on her. He was still laughing as he whoomed

the Olds between the pale dead glow of houses and roared up the ramp onto the Freeway. Ahead was the promising glitter of adventure-calling neon, and he looked up at the high skies of night and his eyes sailed the glaring wonders of escape.

* * * * *

He burned off some rubber finding a slot in the park-lot. He strode under a sign reading _Public Youth Center No. 947_ and walked casually to the reception desk, where a thin man with sergeant's stripes and a pansy haircut looked out of a pile of paperwork.

"Where you think you're going, my pretty lad?"

Wayne grinned down. "Higher I hope than a typewriter jockey."

"Well," the sergeant said. "How tough we are this evening. You have a pass, killer?"

"Wayne Seton. Draft call."

"Oh." The sergeant checked his name off a roster and nodded. He wrote on a slip of paper, handed the pass to Wayne. "Go to the Armory and check out whatever your lusting little heart desires. Then report to Captain Jack, room 307."

"Thanks, sarge dear," Wayne said and took the elevator up to the Armory.

A tired fat corporal with a naked head blinked up at tall Wayne. Finally he said, "So make up your mind, bud. Think you're the only kid breaking out tonight?"

"Hold your teeth, pop," Wayne said, coolly and slowly lighting a cigarette. "I've decided."

The corporal's little eyes studied Wayne with malicious amusement. "Take it from a vet, bud. Sooner you go the better. It's a big city and you're starting late. You can get a cat, not a mouse, and some babes are clever hellcats in a dark alley."

"You must be a genius," Wayne said. "A corporal with no hair and still a counterboy. I'm impressed. I'm all ears, Dad."

The corporal sighed wearily. "You can get that balloon head ventilated, bud, and good."

Wayne's mouth twitched. He leaned across the counter toward the shelves and racks of weapons. "I'll remember that crack when I get my commission." He blew smoke in the corporal's face. "Bring me a Smith and Wesson .38, shoulder holster with spring-clip. And throw in a Skelly switchblade for kicks--the six-inch disguised job with the double springs."

The corporal waddled back with the revolver and the switchblade

disguised in a leather comb case. He checked them on a receipt ledger, while Wayne examined the weapons, broke open the revolver, twirled the cylinder and pushed cartridges into the waiting chamber. He slipped the knife from the comb case, flicked open the blade and stared at its gleam in the buttery light as his mouth went dry and the refracted incandescence of it trickled on his brain like melted ice, exciting and scary.

He removed his leather jacket. He slung the holster under his left armpit and tested the spring clip release several times, feeling the way the serrated butt dropped into his wet palm. He put his jacket back on and the switchblade case in his pocket. He walked toward the elevator and didn't look back as the corporal said, "Good luck, tiger."

Captain Jack moved massively. The big stone-walled office, alive with stuffed lion and tiger and gunracks, seemed to grow smaller. Captain Jack crossed black-booted legs and whacked a cane at the floor. It had a head shaped like a grinning bear.

Wayne felt the assured smile die on his face. Something seemed to shrink him. If he didn't watch himself he'd begin feeling like a pea among bowling balls.

Contemptuously amused little eyes glittered at Wayne from a shaggy head. Shoulders hunched like stuffed sea-bags.

"Wayne Seton," said Captain Jack as if he were discussing something in a bug collection. "Well, well, you're really fired up aren't you? Really going out to eat 'em. Right, punk?"

"Yes, sir," Wayne said. He ran wet hands down the sides of his chinos. His legs seemed sheathed in lead as he bit inwardly at shrinking fear the way a dog snaps at a wound. You big overblown son, he thought, I'll show you but good who is a punk. They made a guy wait and sweat until he screamed. They kept a guy on the fire until desire leaped in him, ran and billowed and roared until his brain was filled with it. But that wasn't enough. If this muscle-bound creep was such a big boy, what was he doing holding down a desk?

"Well, this is it, punk. You go the distance or start a butterfly collection."

The cane darted up. A blade snicked from the end and stopped an inch from Wayne's nose. He jerked up a shaky hand involuntarily and clamped a knuckle-ridged gag to his gasping mouth.

Captain Jack chuckled. "All right, superboy." He handed Wayne his passcard. "Curfew's off, punk, for 6 hours. You got 6 hours to make out."

"Yes, sir."

"Your beast is primed and waiting at the Four Aces Club on the West Side. Know where that is, punk?"

"No, sir, but I'll find it fast."

"Sure you will, punk," smiled Captain Jack. "She'll be wearing yellow slacks and a red shirt. Black hair, a cute trick. She's with a hefty psycho who eats punks for breakfast. He's butchered five people. They're both on top of the Undesirable list, Seton. They got to go and they're your key to the stars."

"Yes, sir," Wayne said.

"So run along and make out, punk," grinned Captain Jack.

* * * * *

A copcar stopped Wayne as he started over the bridge, out of bright respectable neon into the murky westside slum over the river.

Wayne waved the pass card, signed by Captain Jack, under the cop's quivering nose. The cop shivered and stepped back and waved him on. The Olds roared over the bridge as the night's rain blew away.

The air through the open window was chill and damp coming from Slumville, but Wayne felt a cold that wasn't of the night or the wind. He turned off into a rat's warren of the inferiors. Lights turned pale, secretive and sparse, the uncared-for streets became rough with pitted potholes, narrow and winding and humid with wet unpleasant smells. Wayne's fearful exhilaration increased as he cruised with bated breath through the dark mazes of streets and rickety tenements crawling with the shadows of mysterious promise.

He found the alley, dark, a gloom-dripping tunnel. He drove cautiously into it and rolled along, watching. His belly ached with expectancy as he spotted the sick-looking dab of neon wanly sparkling.

FOUR ACES CLUB

He parked across the alley. He got out and stood in shadows, digging the sultry beat of a combo, the wild pulse of drums and spinning brass filtering through windows painted black.

He breathed deep, started over, ducked back. A stewbum weaved out of a bank of garbage cans, humming to himself, pulling at a rainsoaked shirt clinging to a pale stick body. He reminded Wayne of a slim grub balanced on one end.

The stewbum stumbled. His bearded face in dim breaking moonlight had a dirty, greenish tinge as he sensed Wayne there. He turned in a grotesque uncoordinated jiggling and his eyes were wide with terror and doom.

"I gotta hide, kid. They're on me."

Wayne's chest rose and his hands curled.

The bum's fingers drew at the air like white talons.

"Help me, kid."

He turned with a scratchy cry and retreated before the sudden blast of headlights from a Cad bulleting into the alley. The Cad rushed past Wayne and he felt the engine-hot fumes against his legs. Tires squealed. The Cad stopped and a teener in black jacket jumped out and crouched as he began stalking the old rummy.

"This is him! This is him all right," the teener yelled, and one hand came up swinging a baseball bat.

A head bobbed out of the Cad window and giggled.

The fumble-footed rummy tried to run and plopped on wet pavement. The teener moved in, while a faint odor of burnt rubber hovered in the air as the Cad cruised in a slow follow-up.

Wayne's breath quickened as he watched, feeling somehow blank wonder at finding himself there, free and breaking out at last with no curfew and no law but his own. He felt as though he couldn't stop anything. Living seemed directionless, but he still would go with it regardless, until something dropped off or blew to hell like a hot light-bulb. He held his breath, waiting. His body was tensed and rigid as he moved in spirit with the hunting teener, an omniscient shadow with a hunting license and a ghetto jungle twenty miles deep.

The crawling stewbum screamed as the baseball bat whacked. The teener laughed. Wayne wanted to shout. He opened his mouth, but the yell clogged up somewhere, so that he remained soundless yet with his mouth still open as he heard the payoff thuds where the useless wino curled up with stick arms over his rheumy face.

The teener laughed, tossed the bat away and began jumping up and down with his hobnailed, mail-order air force boots. Then he ran into the Cad. A hootch bottle soared out, made a brittle tink-tink of falling glass.

"Go, man!"

The Cad wooshed by. It made a sort of hollow sucking noise as it bounced over the old man twice. Then the finlights diminished like bright wind-blown sparks.

Wayne walked over and sneered down at the human garbage lying in scummed rain pools. The smell of raw violence, the scent of blood, made his heart thump like a trapped rubber ball in a cage.

He hurried into the Four Aces, drawn by an exhilarating vision ... and pursued by the hollow haunting fears of his own desires.

* * * * *

He walked through the wavering haze of smoke and liquored dizziness and stood until his eyes learned the dark. He spotted her red shirt and yellow legs over in the corner above a murky lighted table.

He walked toward her, watching her little subhuman pixie face lift. The eyes widened with exciting terror, turned even paler behind a red slash of sensuous mouth. Briefed and waiting, primed and eager for running, she recognized her pursuer at once. He sat at a table near her, watching and grinning and seeing her squirm.

She sat in that slightly baffled, fearful and uncomprehending attitude of being motionless, as though they were all actors performing in a weirdo drama being staged in that smoky thick-aired dive.

Wayne smiled with wry superiority at the redheaded psycho in a dirty T-shirt, a big bruiser with a gorilla face. He was tussling his mouse heavy.

"What's yours, teener?" the slug-faced waiter asked.

"Bring me a Crusher, buddyroo," Wayne said, and flashed his pass card.

"Sure, teener."

Red nuzzled the mouse's neck and made drooly noises. Wayne watched and fed on the promising terror and helplessness of her hunted face. She sat rigid, eyes fixed on Wayne like balls of frozen glass.

Red looked up and stared straight at Wayne with eyes like black buttons imbedded in the waxlike skin of his face. Then he grinned all on one side. One huge hand scratched across the wet table top like a furious cat's.

Wayne returned the challenging move but felt a nervous twitch jerk at his lips. A numbness covered his brain like a film as he concentrated on staring down Red the psycho. But Red kept looking, his eyes bright but dead. Then he began struggling it up again with the scared little mouse.

The waiter sat the Crusher down. Wayne signed a chit; tonight he was in the pay of the state.

"What else, teener?"

"One thing. Fade."

"Sure, teener," the waiter said, his breathy words dripping like syrup.

Wayne drank. Liquored heat dripped into his stomach. Fire tickled his veins, became hot wire twisting in his head.

He drank again and forced out a shaky breath. The jazz beat thumped fast and muted brass moaned. Drumpulse, stabbing trumpet raped the

air. Tension mounted as Wayne watched her pale throat convulsing, the white eyelids fluttering. Red fingered at her legs and salivated at her throat, glancing now and then at Wayne, baiting him good.

"Okay, you creep," Wayne said.

He stood up and started through the haze. The psycho leaped and a table crashed. Wayne's .38 dropped from its spring-clip holster and the blast filled the room. The psycho screamed and stumbled toward the door holding something in. The mouse darted by, eluded Wayne's grasp and was out the door.

Wayne went out after her in a laughing frenzy of release. He felt the cold strange breath of moist air on his sweating skin as he sprinted down the alley into a wind full of blowing wet.

He ran laughing under the crazy starlight and glimpsed her now and then, fading in and out of shadows, jumping, crawling, running with the life-or-death animation of a wild deer.

Up and down alleys, a rat's maze. A rabbit run. Across vacant lots. Through shattered tenement ruins. Over a fence. There she was, falling, sliding down a brick shute.

He gained. He moved up. His labored breath pumped more fire. And her scream was a rejuvenation hypo in his blood.

* * * * *

She quivered above him on the stoop, panting, her eyes afire with terror.

"You, baby," Wayne gasped. "I gotcha."

She backed into darkness, up there against the sagging tenement wall, her arms out and poised like crippled wings. Wayne crept up. She gave a squeaking sob, turned, ran. Wayne leaped into gloom. Wood cracked. He clambered over rotten lumber. The doorway sagged and he hesitated in the musty dark. A few feet away was the sound of loose trickling plaster, a whimpering whine.

"No use running," Wayne said. "Go loose. Give, baby. Give now."

She scurried up sagging stairs. Wayne laughed and dug up after her, feeling his way through debris. Dim moonlight filtered through a sagging stairway from a shattered skylight three floors up. The mouse's shadow floated ahead.

He started up. The entire stair structure canted sickeningly. A railing ripped and he nearly went with it back down to the first floor. He heard a scream as rotten boards crumbled and dust exploded from cracks. A rat ran past Wayne and fell into space. He burst into the third-floor hallway and saw her half-falling through a door under the jagged skylight.

Wayne took his time. He knew how she felt waiting in there, listening to his creeping, implacable footfalls.

Then he yelled and slammed open the door.

Dust and stench, filth so awful it made nothing of the dust. In the corner he saw something hardly to be called a bed. More like a nest. A dirty, lumpy pile of torn mattress, felt, excelsior, shredded newspapers and rags. It seemed to crawl a little under the moon-streaming skylight.

She crouched in the corner panting. He took his time moving in. He snickered as he flashed the switchblade and circled it like a serpent's tongue. He watched what was left of her nerves go to pieces like rotten cloth.

"Do it quick, hunter," she whispered. "Please do it quick."

"What's that, baby?"

"I'm tired running. Kill me first. Beat me after. They won't know the difference."

"I'm gonna bruise and beat you," he said.

"Kill me first," she begged. "I don't want--" She began to cry. She cried right up in his face, her wide eyes unblinking, and her mouth open.

"You got bad blood, baby," he snarled. He laughed but it didn't sound like him and something was wrong with his belly. It was knotting up.

"Bad, I know! So get it over with, please. Hurry, hurry."

She was small and white and quivering. She moaned but kept staring up at him.

He ripped off his rivet-studded belt and swung once, then groaned and shuffled away from her.

He kept backing toward the door. She crawled after him, begging and clutching with both arms as she wriggled forward on her knees.

"Don't run. Please. Kill me! It'll be someone else if you don't. Oh, God, I'm so tired waiting and running!"

"I can't," he said, and sickness soured in his throat.

"Please."

"I can't, I can't!"

He turned and ran blindly, half-fell down the cracking stairs.

* * * * *

Doctor Burns, head of the readjustment staff at the Youth Center, studied Wayne with abstract interest.

"You enjoyed the hunt, Seton? You got your kicks?"

"Yes, sir."

"But you couldn't execute them?"

"No, sir."

"They're undesirables. Incurables. You know that, Seton?"

"Yes, sir."

"The psycho you only wounded. He's a five-times murderer. And that girl killed her father when she was twelve. You realize there's nothing can be done for them? That they have to be executed?"

"I know."

"Too bad," the doctor said. "We all have aggressive impulses, primitive needs that must be expressed early, purged. There's murder in all of us, Seton. The impulse shouldn't be denied or suppressed, but educated. The state used to kill them. Isn't it better all around, Seton, for us to do it, as part of growing up? What was the matter, Seton?"

"I--felt sorry for her."

"Is that all you can say about it?"

"Yes, sir."

The doctor pressed a buzzer. Two men in white coats entered.

"You should have got it out of your system, Seton, but now it's still in there. I can't turn you out and have it erupt later--and maybe shed clean innocent blood, can I?"

"No, sir," Wayne mumbled. He didn't look up. "I'm sorry I punked out."

"Give him the treatment," the doctor said wearily. "And send him back to his mother."

Wayne nodded and they led him away. His mind screamed still to split open some prison of bone and lay bare and breathing wide. But there was no way out for the trapped. Now he knew about the old man and his poker-playing pals.

They had all punked out.

Like him.

=====

MR. THOMPSON AND THE BULL-FROG.

by Allan Forman

from Project Gutenberg's Harper's Young People, January 24, 1882, by Various

Mr. Thompson was lying in the shade on the bank of a small pond. He had come out to read, he said, but no sooner had he thrown himself on the soft turf than an irresistible desire to sleep came upon him; so, pillowing his head on his book, he closed his eyes.

"Cut-a-ka-chunk, cut-a-ka-chunk," croaked a big green frog down in the pond.

"I wish you'd keep still," growled Mr. Thompson.

"He's-goin'-to-sleep, he's-goin'-to-sleep," answered the frog, in a deep bass voice.

"Just-hear-him-snore, just-hear-him-snore," piped a little green fellow, sitting on a lily pad.

Mr. Thompson was getting angry. "I'm not asleep," he shouted.

"Don't-you-get-mad, don't-you-get-mad," urged the old frog.

This was too much. Mr. Thompson sat up and looked around. Directly in front of him, in the edge of the pond, sat a great bull-frog, dressed in a green coat, a canary-colored vest, and dark brown knee-breeches. He winked at Mr. Thompson sociably, and remarked, "How-do-you-do? how-do-you-do? how-do-you-do?"

"Pretty well," answered Mr. Thompson; "but I'm very sleepy."

"Come-take-a-swim," advised the frog, laconically.

"I would," said Mr. Thompson, hesitating, "only I'm afraid I'd get wet, and spoil my clothes."

"Never-hurts-mine, never-hurts-mine," answered the frog, jumping into the pond and taking a few strokes.

"But you see my clothes are not like yours," explained Mr. Thompson.

"Look-just-the-same, look-just-the-same," answered the frog.

Mr. Thompson looked down at his vest; the white had changed to lemon-color; his sober black pantaloons were metamorphosed into natty snuff-colored knee-breeches; and worst of all, his alpaca duster had become a tight green cut-away coat.

"If Angelina should see me in this rig, what would she say?" murmured Mr. Thompson, in despairing tones.

"Better-come-in, better-come-in," croaked the frog, with something like a smile on his broad mouth.

"I guess I will," thought Mr. Thompson, and plunging head first he dived into the pond. He soon came up with his mouth full of mud. That, of course, annoyed him, but he was more interested in how the mud got into his mouth, for, diving as he did, he should have struck the top of his head. He put his hand up to feel. Horror! instead of touching the top of his head, he thrust his hand into his mouth. He felt again; _his mouth was on the top of his head_. He climbed up on a lily pad, and looked at his reflection in the water. He could hardly believe his eyes; there was no Mr. Thompson; only a great green and yellow frog. The other frog was sitting not far off, watching him with an air of amusement.

"There are some boys on the bridge, and they are going to throw stones at us," whispered the old frog. Mr. Thompson forgot his sudden change of appearance, and assuming his most pompous manner, he shouted, "You-mustn't-do-that, you-mustn't-do-that."

"You old fool," bellowed the old frog, as he plunged into the water.

Mr. Thompson thought discretion to be the better part of valor, and followed.

"He's gone under," remarked one of the boys, regretfully. "Wouldn't he have made a splendid fry?"

Mr. Thompson rose with his nose under a lily pad and shuddered. His friend came up beside him. "What did you want to speak for when those boys were there? You only let them know where we were," he said, rather crossly. "That is the reason we wear green coats, so that we can sit among the lily pads and not be seen."

Mr. Thompson replied that he had forgot himself, and spoke without thinking. "So that's the reason for wearing green coats?" he added.

"Yes," replied the old frog. "Now you see my son here wears brown long clothes," he added, pointing to a pollywog that wiggled up to him. "That is because he stays on the bottom, and if he sees a boy, he keeps still, and his enemies think that he is a lump of mud or a stone."

"Ah," said Mr. Thompson, "and green coats have been in fashion for a long time?"

"Ever since the days of Homer. Don't you remember in Homer's poem, 'The Battle of the Frogs and Mice,' he says, 'Green was the suit his arming heroes chose'?"

"Oh yes," answered Mr. Thompson.

"My great-grandfather was in that battle, and my uncle was the original frog who would a-wooing go," continued the old frog; "but you know he got eaten up. He was a French frog, I think; at least I never saw an American frog with an opera hat."

How much more the old frog would have said Mr. Thompson never knew, for there on the bank he saw his beloved Angelina, sitting beside his deserted book, weeping as if her heart would break.

"I am here, dear one," he shouted. At the same moment he felt a sensation of dampness, and found himself lying half in the pond. He rose and accompanied Miss Angelina home; then, after putting on dry clothes, he related his adventures to a company of his friends. All were interested except one skeptical young man.

"But if my story is not true, how did I come in the pond?" argued Mr. Thompson.

"You got asleep, and rolled in; then when you felt wet, you dreamed that you were a frog," said the skeptical young man.

"That's not at all likely," sniffed Mr. Thompson, indignantly.

"Likely or not, it's undoubtedly true."

"Listen," said Mr. Thompson. Then far down in the marsh was heard the faint sound of the frog's chorus:

"Thompson-got-wet, Thompson-got-wet--
Ha, ha, ha, ha;
Guess-he-is-yet, guess-he-is-yet--
Ha, ha.
Had-to-go-home, had-to-go-home--
Ha, ha, ha, ha;
He'd-better-not-come, he'd-better-not-come--
Ha, ha."

"What do you say to that?" cried Mr. Thompson, shaking his head triumphantly, as he walked off to bed.